DREAMS AND MACHINES™

GAMEMASTER'S GUIDE

MŌDIPHIŪS® ENTERTAINMENT

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I don't know who these people are but this is MY book!
Signed, KARI

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DREAMS AND MACHINES™

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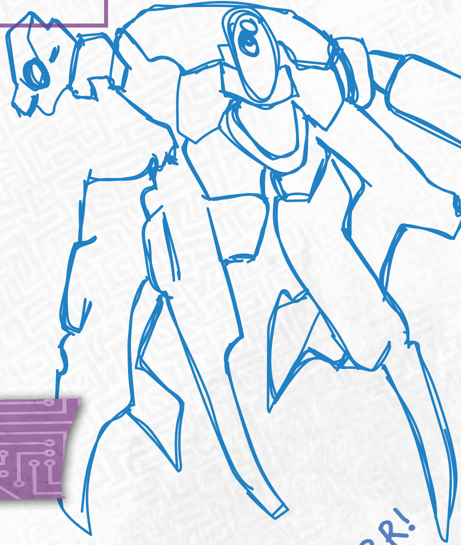
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ooooh, story time!



Waker goes BRRRR!

THE TIES THAT BIND

“Junk.”

A boy lay on his side in the shadows of a crane, the orange sleeves of his too-large jumpsuit rolled up past his elbows. He casually tossed a broken piece into a growing pile nearby, not slowing his pace as he continued disassembling the engine. “Junk.” Another piece was pulled from the engine and discarded. The boy worked quickly, the wrench in his gloved hand moving mostly by feel, he’d long grown past the point he needed to see what he was doing. Instead, his eyes were screwed tightly shut, to better focus on what his fingers were doing.

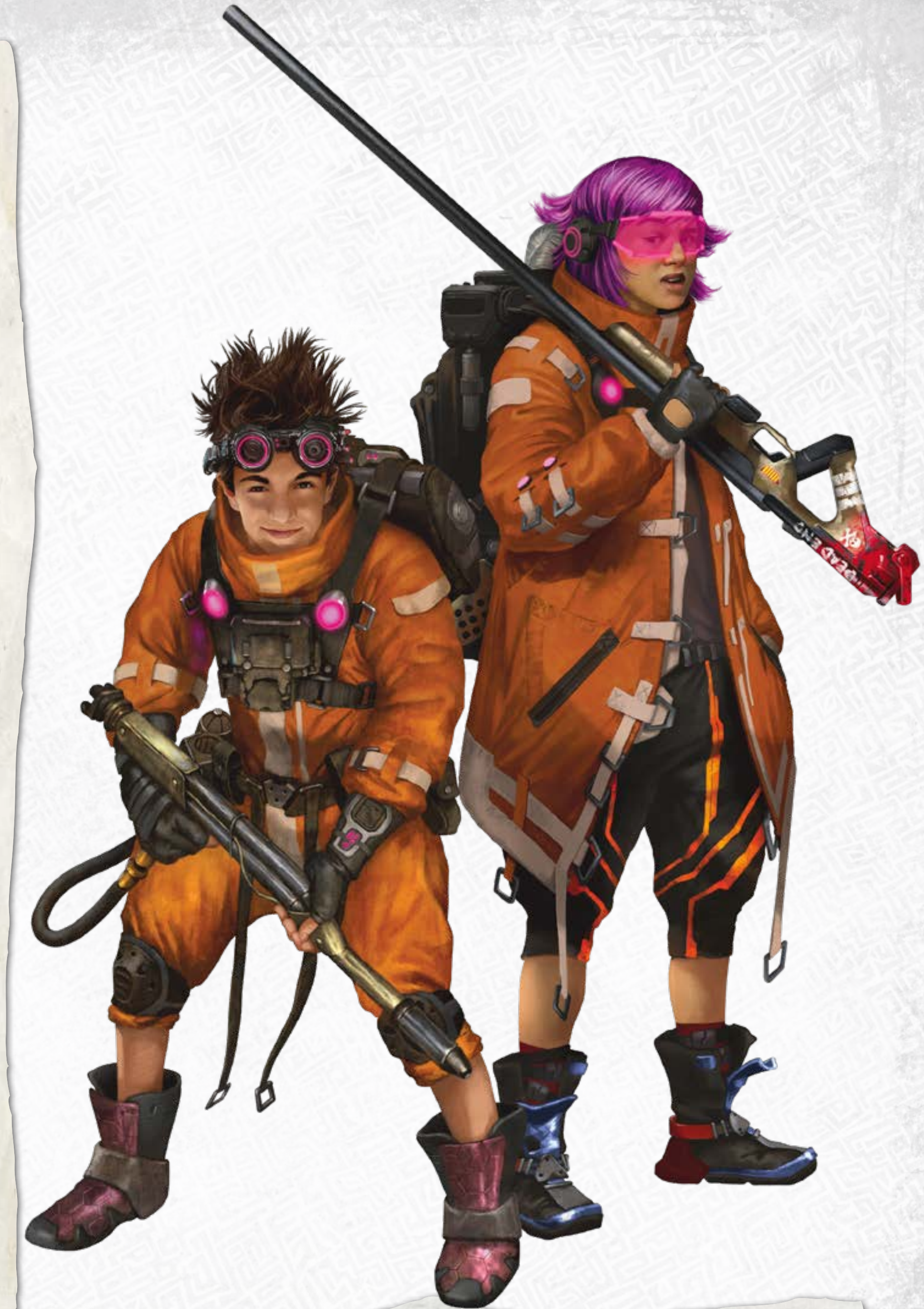
Nearby, a slightly older girl stood with a heavy pulser rifle resting in the crook of her arms. She wore a coat that perfectly matched the younger boy’s jumpsuit, right down to being several sizes too large. Her body was relaxed. A transparent visor sat astride her eyes, its violet color matching her unruly hair. “Are you almost done?” she asked in hushed tones, leaning forward to look around the side of the crane. There was a gentle rattling from the latest piece in the boy’s hand as he muttered, “Fun, but still junk” and tossed it aside.

“Aleixo!” the girl hissed, resisting the urge to kick her younger brother. The boy’s eyes popped open, and he glanced towards her. “What?!” his voice held all the irritation and volume a ten year old’s could, causing his sister to jump, and raise her pulser as she scanned the perimeter.

"What, Izabel," he enunciated her name as clearly and rudely as he could, dragging it out for emphasis. "What is so importan-" She didn't bother looking back down at him, (he always hated it when she talked to him without looking at him). "Our lives, for one. Time, for another." She nodded her head slightly, indicating the sky, "Sun's goin' down. We need to get movin' while there's still light." Aleixo's questing wrench found a hold on something, and his dark eyes flicked towards the sky as he swore under his breath, gritting his teeth.

"What was that?" Izabel scolded, narrowing her eyes in what she hoped was a properly chastising look. She was only four years older than him, but she did her level best to try to pass on the wisdom and manners their parents had imparted. If Aleixo noticed, it didn't phase him. He twisted the wrench harder, "I SAID it'll be finished when it's done! I don't wanna leave until we get somethin' to trade for actual food with old Samora. I'm tired of emergency bars!" If he hadn't been so focused on the wrench, he would have been shouting.

"They. Taste. Like. Garbage!"



Every word was bitten off in a mix of frustration and determination, as he braced his arm and twisted with all of his might. As the last word left his mouth, there was a loud bang as the piece came loose, and the wrench slipped, smacking against the metal housing. When the reverberations stopped, a slight buzzing sound remained, as well as a dull blue light, both emanating from inside the machine.

Izabel's head jerked towards Aleixo, her mouth open and his name on her lips, before she caught sight of both the light and the self-satisfied smirk on his face. His hands came loose and he held the part up, shoving it into Izabel's face. "See?" he said loudly, "Somethin' like this! That old River's sure to give us something for a functional energy converter… Even if it is half-dead." He tapped the side of the glowing cylinder, and sighed. He brightened almost immediately however, his eyes locking with

They DO taste like garbage!

Izabel's as he practically danced in place with his prize. "And you said this thing didn't have anything worth grabbin'!" He patted the crane lovingly, his glove leaving a grease-stained handprint on the side.

In spite of herself, Izabel felt the corners of her mouth drift upwards. As annoying as he could be, she had to admit the kid was good with a wrench, and he had a nose for when a grab was worth the energy. She reached out to take it, intending to congratulate him and admit she'd been wrong.

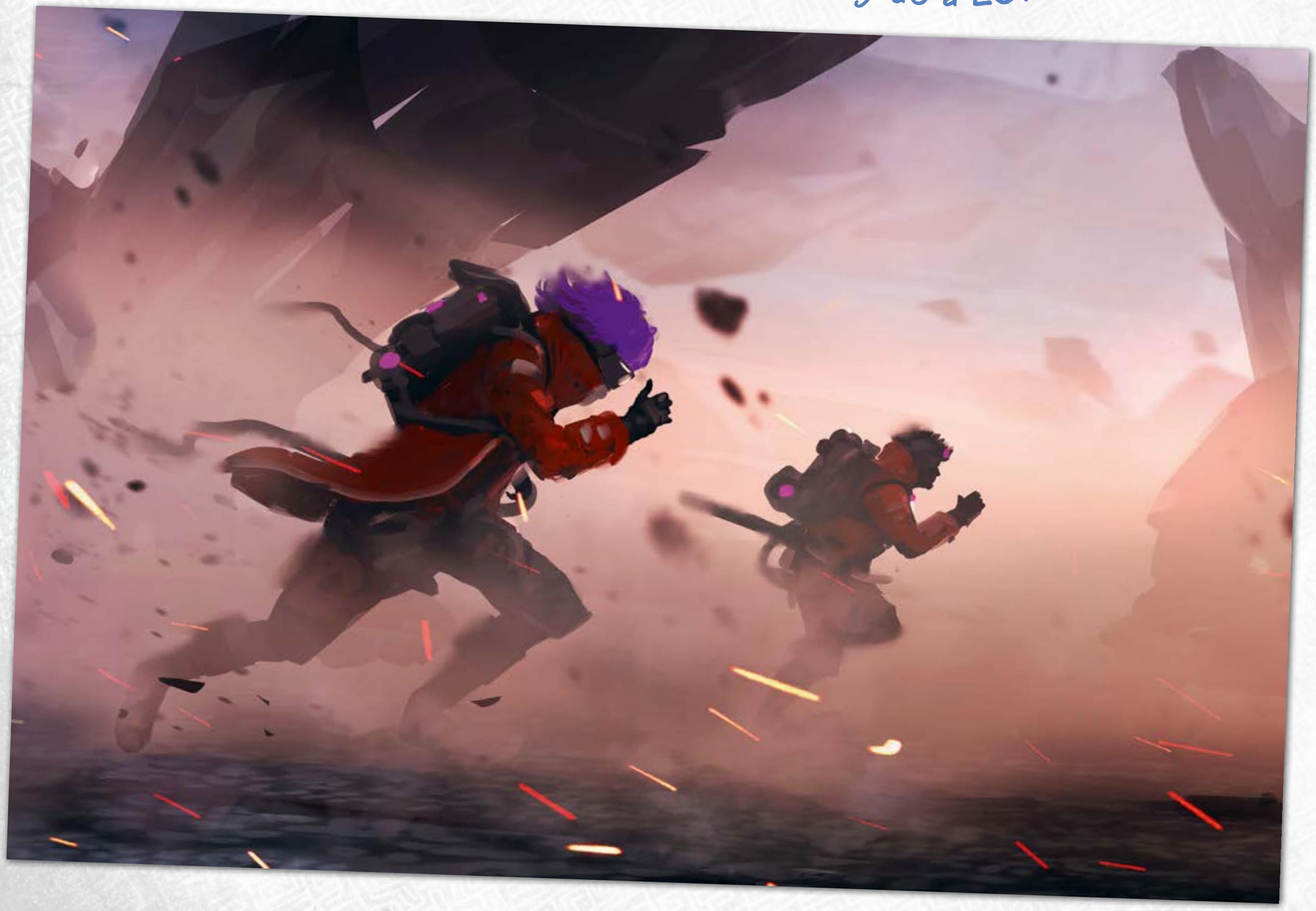
Until she heard the sounds of people coming down the nearby streets.

She didn't wait to see if Aleixo had heard, snatching the cell from his hand and tucking it into the pack on her back before grabbing her brother's hand and hurrying quickly from the raised platform to the street below, darting towards a random doorway across the way. The two had barely made it inside and tucked themselves tightly against the walls when a group of people came running around the corner, gripping weapons of their own and looking about hungrily.

"It came from this direction, I'm sure of it!"

Izabel took a deep breath, and steadied herself, hoping the group would just pass them by. The world hadn't fallen so far that most people would hurt a pair of children, but one never knew. At the very least, the group would almost assuredly relieve them of what little salvage they'd managed to find. She resisted the urge to peek around the doorway, and forced herself to take soft, shallow breaths. Aleixo had held on to his wrench, and fortunately, he'd remembered to grab his tool pack. If they were very lucky, these people wouldn't know they'd been there, and chalk it up to a Waker.

They do a LOT of running like me!



Of course, that hope was dashed almost immediately. "Look!" one of them shouted, no doubt pointing at the hand print Aleixo had left behind. Izabel winced and shifted herself slowly and quietly to a kneeling position. "Spread out! Find whoever was here!" The voice was loud, and it did not sound friendly.

The Grabber Twins, as many called them, were no strangers to danger. They'd been part of this lifestyle from the moment they'd been born. Izabel had followed their father's lead, and was a deadly shot with the hunting pulser she now gripped tightly. Part of that training, however, had been to know when to fight and when to run. Taking on a fully armed party of competing Grabbers? That was beyond her. Aleixo, although brave, was far more skilled with tools, and with vehicles, than he was with weaponry. Izabel was going to have to be the one to protect them.

She smiled, though more for Aleixo's sake than her own. They were a team. They had to be, just to survive this life, but she still always had the urge to comfort her brother. He would do his part to rescue them. But first, she had to do hers.

Her hand rose to the visor she wore, turning on the infrared function. It was always dangerous to use that level of technology, but the risk was less dangerous than if the Grabbers got hold of them, and they could use the darkness in the building to cover their getaway. Aleixo took a deep breath, and lowered the protective goggles over his eyes. They didn't have the same functionality as Izabel's, but they looked cool and made him feel better. He didn't need to be told to keep quiet, they'd been in enough similar situations that he knew that. Slowly, with Izabel leading the way, they crept through the ruins of the old building, moving down a hallway, and shutting the door quietly behind them. The sound of the Grabbers' search faded almost instantly. Not long after, they heard someone enter the building. The twins listened to the frantic sounds of searching in the rooms behind them as they made their way towards a window, keeping their steps slow and deliberate. The window frame was centuries old, but parts of the glass remained. The twins looked at each other, knowing that they would have to risk it. They each took another steadying breath, looking at each other. They mouthed the words, "Hang tight," before Izabel smashed the glass out with the butt of the pulser.

Aleixo went first, practically diving through the frame, and rolling onto the sidewalk outside. Izabel passed her brother the hunting pulser before she clambered through, the sounds of shouting and pursuit already starting behind them. By the time the first competing Grabber made it to the window, the twins were halfway down the block. As they ran, their boots pounding the destroyed pavement beneath them, they could hear people following them through the window, and others coming around the far side of the building. Still, Aleixo had a wide grin, tossing his sister the pulser mid-run. He knew something their pursuers didn't. The twins had a trump card up their sleeve, and then they'd show them what real speed was.

The twins took a hard left down a nearby street that had remnants of old vehicles lining the sides. The group was following far too closely for Izabel's comfort, but they should still make it. Halfway down the street, the twins darted into the gaping mouth of a half-crumpled building, Aleixo's hand already going to his neck. He gripped the shiny silver key that hung there, and pulled hard, breaking the string that held it even as he threw himself into the seat of the vehicle hidden within. Izabel didn't look back as she threw herself into the passenger side. Aleixo slammed the key home and twisted, the vehicle roaring to life.

Though the twins called it a "car", in reality, it had started life as an Everan Off-Road Emergency Vehicle. It had a sleek body that hailed back to old Earth dune buggies, down to an open passenger cab, covered only by a rail frame. While once it had been silver, with cobalt accents stretching across its aerodynamic form, it now bore a color scheme that could charitably be called "subdued". The twins' father had always sworn that the layers of dirt and paint covering the "car" in geometric shapes and whorls were meant as camouflage to confuse Wakers, but their mother quietly said he'd just gotten bored with gray-green paint. Each wheel attached to a separate arm, coming together in a cantilevered suspension system. The original tires had long since been replaced with puncture-proof tires that could stand up to even the worst terrain Evera could throw at them. However, by far the biggest modification was the one Izabel was most familiar with: the free rotating, heavy-duty plasma charger that had replaced the back-seat. The twins had installed it themselves after their parents died. They hadn't seen much point in keeping the extra seating. Other people would only slow them down. Izabel, however, didn't think that would be necessary this time around. There were a lot of the other "Grabbers", but they were clearly a disorganized mob of scavengers, barely worthy of the title.

Aleixo pressed his foot onto the pedal, his grin widening with every rev, before he put it into gear, and surged into the street. The boy laughed as he saw the looks on the other Grabbers' faces turn from excitement, to confusion, and then utter terror in less than an second, before the group scattered, and ran. He considered gunning the engine and running down at least a few of them, but he glanced to Izabel, who gave him a long-suffering look and shook her head. She utterly despised cowardice and disorganization, but it wasn't worth the clean-up. And she still had to set the best example she could. So Aleixo executed a perfect three-point turn, and drove back the way they'd come. This Grab was over, and it was time to move on.

If they hurried, they'd be able to make it to New Mossgrove before midnight, and get some sleep. Dust flew as the buggy tore down what remained of the road, and the twins fell into a companionable silence. Aleixo adjusted his circular, purple-rimmed safety goggles and looked towards the sun, flipping the visor down and catching a glimpse of the old drawing stuck there. Two little figures had been traced in crayon, sitting in the back of a crudely drawn vehicle, while two much larger figures in matching orange and white jumpsuits sat in front. A word bubble coming off of one of the larger figures stated simply, "Hang tight!" All of them were smiling happily. Unconsciously, he reached out to touch it with his gloved fingers, idly remembering that his mom had traded part of an old printer to get him those crayons after a bad Grab. The thought made him glance over to where his sister was staring off into the distance. He wondered sometimes what she was thinking, but tonight, there was no need to wonder. Neither of them needed to say anything. A half-dead energy converter wouldn't let them break even, let alone turn a profit. He considered asking if she wanted to try another spot, but he knew what she'd say. She'd want to take her time, and plan. Normally, that was a good thing. It had saved their lives on more occasions than he could count. Like today. They'd only been so close to the vehicle because Izabel constantly insisted they stay nearby. Caution and planning were good things. But those alone wouldn't pay for food.

And he was so tired of those emergency bars.

Without another thought, he turned onto a side street. They were on the outskirts of the old city now. If they hurried, they'd probably be okay. "Hey, dork. You turned the wrong way." Izabel said, pointing in the direction they'd been going. "I know!" Aleixo called, "But there's something up here I want to check out first!" It wasn't a lie. Technically. Even if the "thing" he was talking about was literally anything that had a chance of some decent salvage. It wasn't particularly likely these days, (all of the good stuff out here had been picked over hundreds of times already), but even a small chance was better than none. Izabel looked at him through her visor, and shook her head, but didn't say anything.

They drove in silence for almost half an hour on the old highway before something caught Aleixo's eye. It was a short, squat building with a closed door. That in and of itself wasn't strange. However, between that, and being just barely visible from the main highway, with an access road only visible from the direction they'd been driving, it might just have escaped other salvagers' notice. Or at least, that was what the young Grabber was hoping.

The tires crunched on gravel as the boy pulled to a stop, tucking the vehicle beside one of the stout pillars that held up the shaky-looking overpass. He jumped out, lifting his goggles and grabbing his tool pack. "I don't like this." Izabel muttered softly, looking once more at the rapidly-setting sun. After a moment's consideration, Aleixo grabbed his electron-cutting tool from the back, plugging it into its power pack. If the door was locked, or if something else happened this time, he wanted to be ready. "You never like what I pick," he pouted at her, already starting towards the building's steel door. "That's because you don't pick!" she said, keeping her voice down, "Picking involves considering. Planning. Any kind of thinking

Glue. Ooops.
Gloops!
GLOOOPS

whatsoever! You don't do any of that! You just sort of… Do things." He still didn't know how she managed to make her words sound so loud without raising her voice. He wondered if it was one of those "older-sibling" things she talked about.

"Well excuse me if I don't waste entire days playing peek-a-boo with old junk!" This time, he wasn't looking at her. He'd see how she liked being ignored! He bent low, and examined the door, finding no lock. There was also plenty of rust flaking off the door itself, but none on the ground, which was a good sign. It meant that no other Grabber had gone through this door. Or at least, not for a long time. He pushed open the door, trusting Izabel to follow him in, even if they were sniping at each other. She did. They were still a team. Even if he was being an irritating little snot at the moment.

Aleixo had stopped just inside the door, holding his hand up and finger-spelling the word for light. Their parents had learned sign language after one of them lost some hearing in an accident. Some of the Spears they used to trade with taught it to them. Apparently, enough of their people were born without hearing that most of them knew it. Even though their mom's hearing had healed, eventually, they'd still used it. It made both trading, and exploration easier, and they'd taught it to their children at the same time they taught them to speak. It still came in handy.

Izabel reached up to her visor and clicked it on, a violet-tinted light shining out ahead as she took the lead with pulser raised. At first, all she illuminated was an old hallway, with racks of plastic containers, covered in strange markings. Some were whole, their contents still inside. Others had fallen to the ground and spilled the remnants of a grey-coloured powder on the floor. She pointed it out with her left hand, finger-spelling the word for danger. She wasn't sure exactly what kind of chemicals had been in those containers, but she also didn't want either of them finding out. Especially not the hard way.

Further in, her light illuminated an old flickering screen, barely visible under a thick coating of dust. However, it was legible enough to read. According to the header on the screen, this had been an old utility building at some point. More than that was difficult to make-out. She also wasn't particularly willing to keep looking, as there wasn't a whole lot of value in the system. She carefully swept her light across floors and walls as they went, looking for anything that might have some decent salvage inside.

After several hallways worth of crumbling cement walls and useless junk, they came to another door. Each of them took a side, listening carefully for any sounds of breathing, or electrical humming. Either could be problematic. However, hearing nothing, Aleixo carefully leaned over to grab the knob, and pulled it open quickly as Izabel entered, her pulser rifle sweeping across the room before she waved her brother in after her.

They stood at the top of a flight of stairs that led downwards into what appeared to be an old basement. Izabel glanced at the younger boy, hoping that she'd find a look of fear, or any other sign that he might be willing to turn back. Of course, she found only that stubborn look he got when he was going to be a brat about something, so she steadied herself, and started down the stairs. Aleixo brought up the rear, looking around with his cutting tool at the ready. It hadn't been designed as a weapon, but Izabel knew from at least one past experience that, as a last resort, it worked equally well cutting through danger as anything else. She hated that Aleixo had needed to do that. But she'd long ago learned that, if they were going to survive in this life, they were going to have to do some uncomfortable things. It didn't mean she had to like it though.

The bottom door was open. They carefully pressed themselves against the side of the door, before Izabel and her pulser led the way. This was something else their parents had taught them. The proper way to enter a building that could be dangerous. They didn't always do it like this. But here? In a building with no light but theirs? It was dangerous enough that even her brother didn't want to risk more than he had to. Even when he was being a little snot, he was still a very good Grabber.

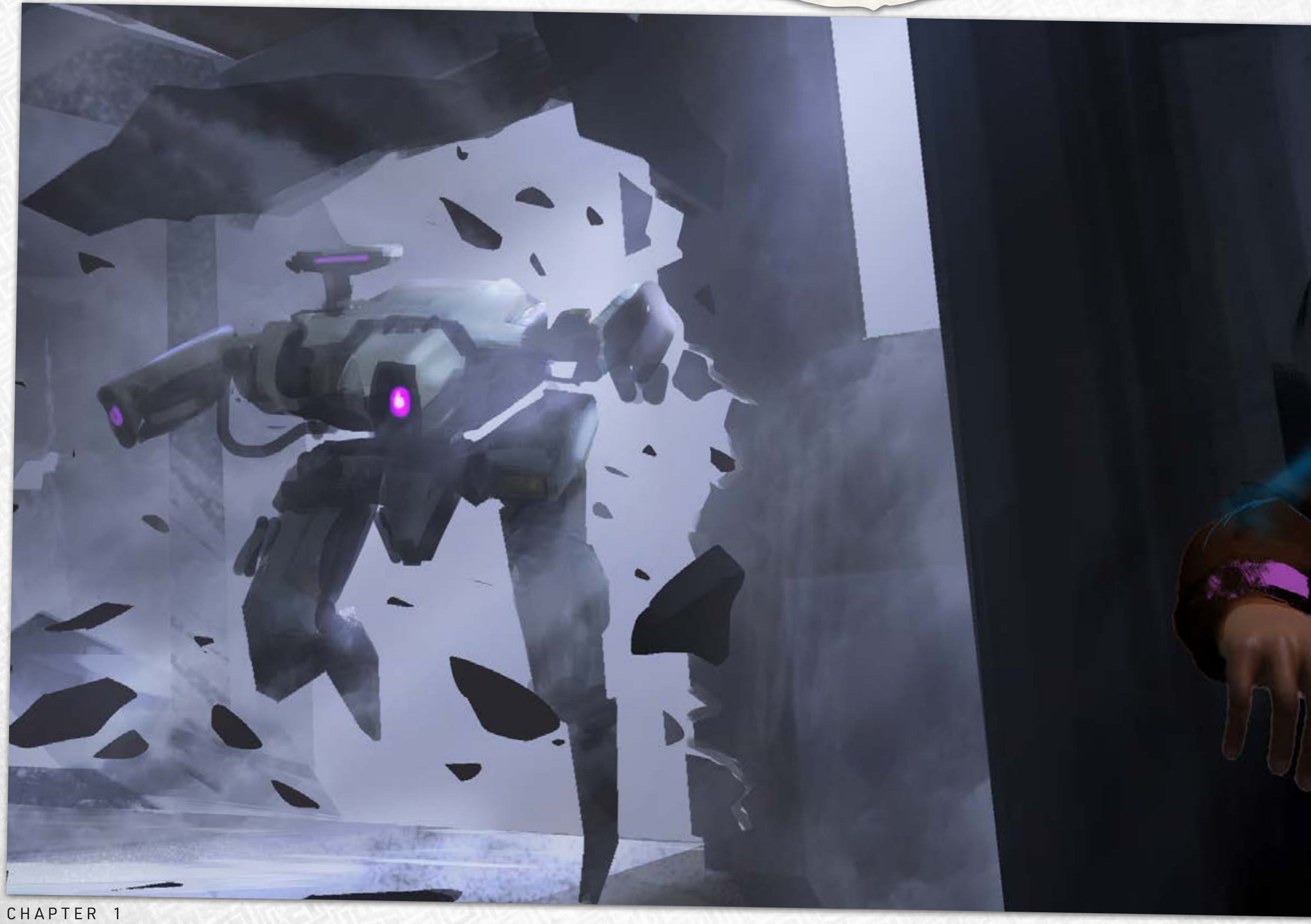
Another short hallway opened up into a much larger room, inside which an old light flickered on as soon as they entered, revealing what appeared to be an old supply basement. More chemicals sat in large plastic barrels a gated off alcove, while nearby there were cleaning supplies from brooms and mops to automated vacuum cleaners, and a few mechanical devices Izabel didn't recognize. Her brother had pushed past her almost without thinking, and had slung his cutting tool over his shoulder, screwdriver in hand, eyes fixed on the possibility of salvage.

The older girl had stopped dead in her tracks. Motion-activation was almost never a good thing. It usually meant that there was too much technology still active in the area. Too much technology meant Wakers.

"Aleixo." She said, her voice sharp as she scanned the room, that bad feeling deepening the longer they stood in the flickering light. Once more, her brother's hyperfocus was keeping him from listening. "Aleixo!" The ten-year old looked up from the circular vacuum cleaner he'd already opened, recognizing the tone in his sister's voice. He looked around the room then, "...You didn't turn on the lights, did you?" Izabel shook her head. "We need to go." Aleixo said. He tucked the circular device up under his arm. There was some really good salvage inside. But it was better if he disassembled it outside, where they could get away if-

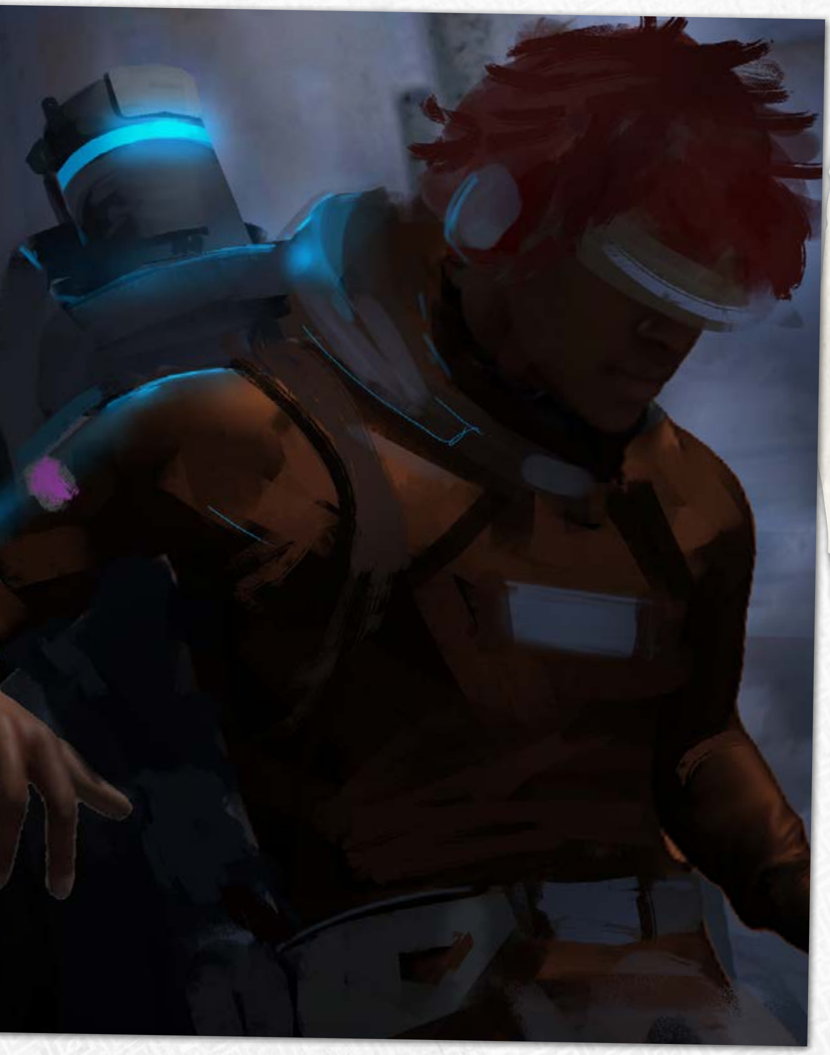
A sharp inhale from his sister brought his attention back to the room behind them, and where a single red light blinked on one of the unfamiliar machines. Aleixo's heart sank when he saw it, while the bad feeling in the pit of Izabel's stomach opened into a yawning chasm of despair. Originally, it had looked like a metal cylinder just slightly taller than a full grown man, with a metal rod sticking up from the center. There was a soft whirring sound, and pieces of the cylinder's casing separated with a hiss of releasing pressure. Six mechanical "arms" emerged from the cylinder, finding their footing as the red light blinked.

"Waker!" the twins shouted in unison, Aleixo heading for the door as Izabel fired a shot at the mechanical monster.



Whether it was shielded, too large, or she'd simply missed, the Grabber girl would never know. She'd left the room before her finger had even left the trigger. "Go, Go, GO!" she shouted, hurrying her brother up the stairs. He'd already discarded whatever device he'd been working on. They couldn't risk the extra weight. They'd never seen this particular Waker design before, and that meant that they had no clue how fast, tough, or strong it was. All they knew was they needed as wide a head start as possible, while it was still booting up.

When they were halfway up the steps, they got part of an answer as it burst through the wall below in an explosion of concrete and steel while barely slowing down. Six legs stabbed into the ground and the walls in a staccato cacophony as it chased the siblings. There were no words. No chastisements and no apologies. There was no time and no breath. If they didn't get back to the car in time, they were going to die.



They all but flew through the darkened hallways by memory and Izabel's violet light, the sound of the Waker steadily gaining on them the entire way, the sound of metal on concrete echoing through the enclosed space making it difficult to tell how much of a lead they had. They pushed themselves as hard as they could, both trying hard not to imagine how close death was following. Finally, they could see the fading light of day in the distance, and every step brought both them and the Waker nearer. The light almost stung their eyes after the dark of the building, and Izabel miscalculated the angle of her step, bouncing off the frame of the door and nearly fell to the ground. In that moment, her life flashed before her eyes, and she expected the end before she felt the small hand of her brother take hers and pull her violently back to her feet. They lurched forward before both of them dove through the buggy's open frame, hurrying into position.

"DriveDriveDRIVE!" she found herself shouting, even as Aleixo started the engine.

"ShootShootSHOOT!" he was shouting, even as Izabel was scrambling into the backseat to take up her gunner's position.

The Waker was not far behind, already bearing down on the buggy as the younger of the Grabber Twins slammed his foot onto the accelerator, rocketing them forward. In an instant, the vehicle was back on the access road. "Hang tight!" her brother shouted over the sounds of the Waker still hurrying after. The wind whistled around them as they pulled onto the highway, matching the high-pitched whine of the plasma charger as Izabel charged it. Her first shot just barely went wide of the Waker. She swore as she charged another, the second ripping a hole into the pavement just behind the machine as the car swerved suddenly to avoid a missing patch of asphalt. Aleixo shouted something, but the wind tore his words away from her ears. She lined up her shot dead on this time, and inhaled as she eased the trigger on the plasma charger… Only for the vehicle to pull a complete U-turn on the highway, fast enough the left side wheels left the ground mid-turn.

The wheels landed with a horrific crashing sound, cutting off the first part of Izabel's cursing "-ll do you think you're doing?!" She shouted at her brother. "Are you trying to kill Us?!" "I told you! We have to go back!" he shouted, bringing them up to speed again. "WHAT DO YOU MEAN GO BACK?!" His sister shouted, trying to aim the plasma charger again, but finding her efforts frustrated as it did not swivel quite far enough. "Go past it!" she shouted, resolving if he got them killed, she'd murder him.

"I know! I know!" he shouted, pushing the engine to its absolute limit as it shot past the Waker. An arm licked out, barely missing the back of the vehicle. Izabel didn't even flinch this time. She brought the charger level, tracking the machine as the weapon's whine reached a crescendo, and a purple bolt of energy shot out, lancing directly through the center of the Waker. It jerked once, sparks flying, and then dropped to the ground like a puppet with its strings cut. They slowed, but didn't stop. Both of them knew these things sometimes played dead. It was only after Izabel had shot each of the arms off that Aleixo stopped the vehicle nearby. Slowly. When it didn't move, he hopped out of his seat before Izabel had a chance to reach him, shooting past where the Waker lay to grab something off the ground.

The older sibling took a long moment to try to calm herself down, her entire body vibrating with the absolute need to grab her brother and shake him as hard as she possibly could. She just couldn't understand it. Aleixo was young, yes, and he was impulsive sometimes, he was ten. But he'd never been so thoroughly… Unprofessional before! He'd never almost gotten them killed before! He knew better! And for what? A piece of salvage? What use was it if they were dead?! She finally managed to stop shaking from a mixture of adrenaline and rage, and threw herself from the gunner's seat, storming towards her brother with murder in her eyes.

When she was close enough to scream at him, she opened her mouth, and promptly closed it again, finally seeing what her younger brother was clutching so tightly. A crumpled piece of paper with old crayon drawings, the words "Hang tight" just barely visible through the new crinkles. Just like that, all the anger bled out of her, and the sharp words she was going to say evaporated into the cool evening air. She sighed, and held him tight to her chest. Partly so that he knew she still loved him. Mostly so that he couldn't see the tears welling up in her eyes. Later, she would help him smooth it out as best they could, and tuck it back up under the visor, hopefully more securely. But for now? She was just glad that they had made it.

"...I love you. Dork."

Some things will survive even the end of the world.

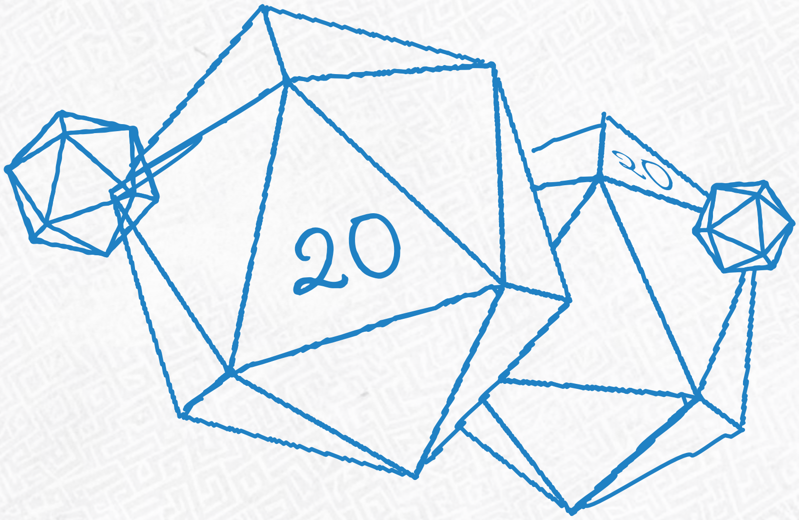
DREAMING AND WAKING

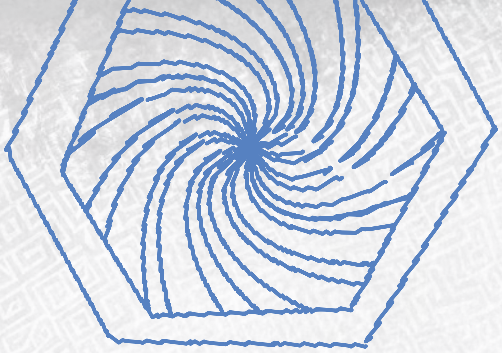
Welcome to the world of Dreams and Machines. A world in the far future, cut off from Earth, where inhabitants balance on a razor's edge between technological distrust and reverence. A world where sleeping mechs form part of the landscape, part of the culture. Banners and flowers decorate the rusting goliaths while the communities that make their homes around them celebrate births, festivals, and harvests all in the shadow of tools of devastation, now slumbering, their former purpose forgotten. Rumors swirl of a Dark City and yet more tell of Wakers. Mechs that move, that kill, that cannot be stopped. But rumors always swirl, like cloth in the wind. Who's to say what is real and what is fiction?

The world is wider than you know. It's time to explore it.

WHAT IS 2D20?

The 2d20 system used in ***Dreams and Machines*** will be familiar to anyone who's played any of our other RPG systems. In this system, any given Test is always taken by rolling 2d20s (hence the name!) and comparing the results to the attribute you're testing against. Any die that rolls equal to or lower than the attribute is a success, and each Test will tell you how many successes you need to pass that Test. You also have a few different options of adding additional d20s, usually by spending resources like Spirit. You'll find after you've been playing a little while that you'll quickly get a feel for the system, and you'll know exactly when to add extra dice and when to simply trust your d20s!





CHAPTER 2

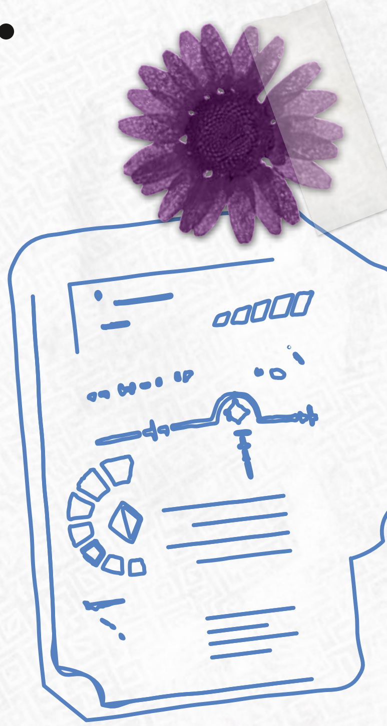
HISTORY AND LORE

It's oh soooo long ago!

THE HISTORY OF EVERA PRIME

THE GREAT MIGRATION

Over a thousand years ago, humanity founded a number of off-world colonies during a period known as the Great Migration, one of the largest of which was Evera Prime. These colonies were funded through a combination of support from various governments and corporate sponsorships as businesses raced to invest in the new colonies.



One of the stumbling blocks that prevented the colonization program from being really successful was the vast distances between Earth and the initial colonies in the solar system. These distances made resupply and governance slow and expensive, since ships took years to reach their destinations. Many programs for extra-long journeys were tested but none proved practical, until a freak accident changed everything. Called the L4 Katrina event after the industrial station destroyed in the accident, the strange emissions from the accident led to theoretical research and finally the Gateways. These massive paired gates were linked in spacetime, and could transit anything over vast distances in a matter of days or weeks. For the passengers the journey was instantaneous, for the relative time of the worlds at each end it would be days or weeks depending on the distance from gate to gate.

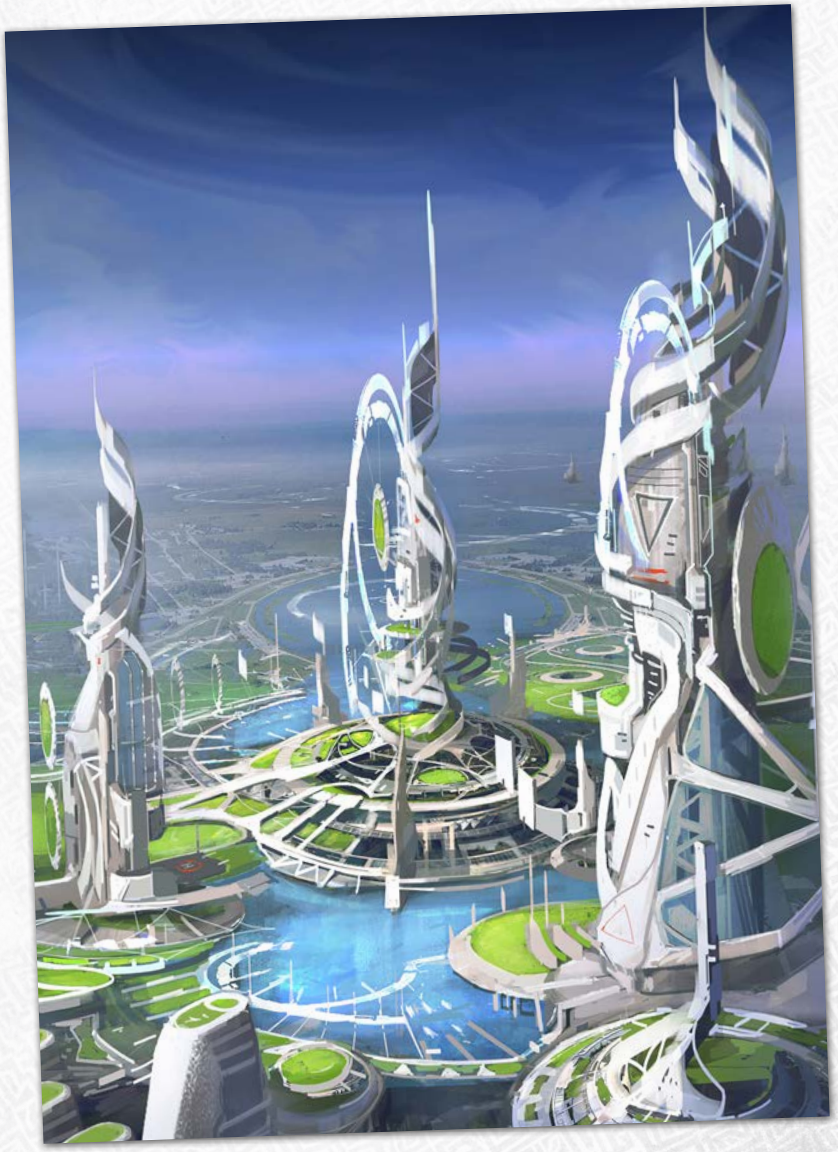
OLD EARTH

Sometime before humanity began expanding to the stars, the northern hemisphere of Earth was embroiled in a brutal war which ended in a limited nuclear exchange. While thankfully fairly limited in scope, this exchange caused a flood of money and refugees to travel to nations in the southern hemisphere. Countries like Brazil, Indonesia, Australia, and South Africa became new global centers of finance and investment almost overnight as the shattered economies of the northern hemisphere nations struggled to cope with the fallout, both literal and figurative, from the nuclear blasts.

As a result, when humanity reached a more civilized era and began to explore the cosmos, the nations of the southern hemisphere were forefront among them, imparting significant elements of their culture and worldview onto the expanding colonies.

Evera Prime was an attractive host planet, with an abundance of natural resources and large areas of habitable land, quickly becoming among the most populous colonial destinations. Several major unusual scientific phenomena in the region of the planet, including several large nebulae, led Earth to choose it as the site of a highly advanced institution called the Everan Center for the Advancement of Science and Energy (ECASE), which conducted cutting-edge research.

Over the course of about two centuries, millions of people traveled to Evera to begin their new lives. However, without warning, the gateway leading to Evera nearest Earth shut down entirely, perhaps destroyed in some catastrophe. This cut off all travel, supplies, and communication to and from Earth, and left a marooned Gateway near Evera Prime. Worse, Everan starships were designed to use the Gateways for journeys of a few weeks, not for decades long journeys through the stars.



The colonists found themselves rudderless and scrambling, short of supplies, technology, and leadership. Various splinter groups vied for control, each with different opinions of how to survive the coming years as they waited for rescue.

While mostly self-sufficient, Evera relied on Earth for some supplies, such as rare minerals which had yet to be found in the Evera system. Unfortunately, rescue never came, and technological capacity dropped as resources were turned toward providing for basic needs.

In the decades after Evera was cut off from Earth, ECASE became a key institution in developing the technology and collective foresight needed for the planet to become self-sufficient. The disparate organizations that controlled most of the planet's resources existed in a state of unrest, however. They varied widely in size and structure, and at first the various leaders argued intensely about the best way forward. Once it became clear that no rescue mission from Earth would arrive, these disagreements turned to distrust.

While Evera narrowly avoided a planet-wide war, this political instability led to the creation of several competing nation states with varying levels of access to the planet's resources and infrastructure. Border skirmishes led to several thankfully brief wars. While the most prosperous nations developed tactical nuclear weapons, they were never used.

Peace treaties led to the establishment of the United Assembly and the mothballing of armed forces. While security forces remained in most nations, they locked their weapons of mass destruction away in deep storage.

THE UNITED ASSEMBLY

After decades of unrest and strife, the United Assembly, consisting of representatives from each nation, brought stability and a burgeoning consensus. But many problems persisted. Public welfare suffered from the inefficiencies of multiple nation states. Science and technology were fractured, efforts duplicated and progress jealously hoarded. But under the United Assembly the leaders of the largest nations began meeting together to exchange best practices and debate ideas.

The United Assembly first focused on the monumental task of codifying a set of laws based on those of Earth to deal with their unique situation. The Everan General Charter was incorporated three years later and the United Assembly could turn to other tasks, primarily to improve life on Evera and answer the mystery of what happened to their home world. The United Assembly's mission was summed up in the simple motto "Rebuild, Reconnect," by then President Astraad Menin.

Many had debated what had happened to Earth and the colonies over the years, but no one knew. The unspoken fear amongst the higher echelons of the United Assembly was that something or someone had destroyed the other colonies and Earth. They had to know the truth, to assess the threat to Evera. What if an alien force had wiped out Earth—were they at risk or safely hidden behind the nebulae? Whichever it was, preparations needed to be made and that required a huge change in industrial and technological capacity.

With the Assembly's support and encouragement ECASE was driven to study, to research, to learn and develop. It was responsible for many great discoveries and advanced theoretical technologies, the distribution of which could greatly ease everyday life. Everan scientists and politicians sought a way to truly connect all nations so that advanced technologies could be rolled out and accessible evenly across the population.

PROJECT BUILDER

Once the worldwide government's functionality and laws were established, the United Assembly turned to its key ambitions. The first steps were to streamline worldwide communication, and expand Evera's computing and industrial capabilities to prepare for the enormous tasks ahead. The United Assembly launched Project Builder, an initiative to create a powerful, intelligent computing system to merge all of the world's electricity grids, utility lines, and data networks into a single smart grid. The Builder would also serve as an immensely powerful computing resource to support the huge scientific development projects. To drive Project Builder forward, the United Assembly established a group called the Dreamers: a global network of cutting-edge scientists and engineers handpicked from ECASE and charged with creating the technology and functionality needed to power the Builder.

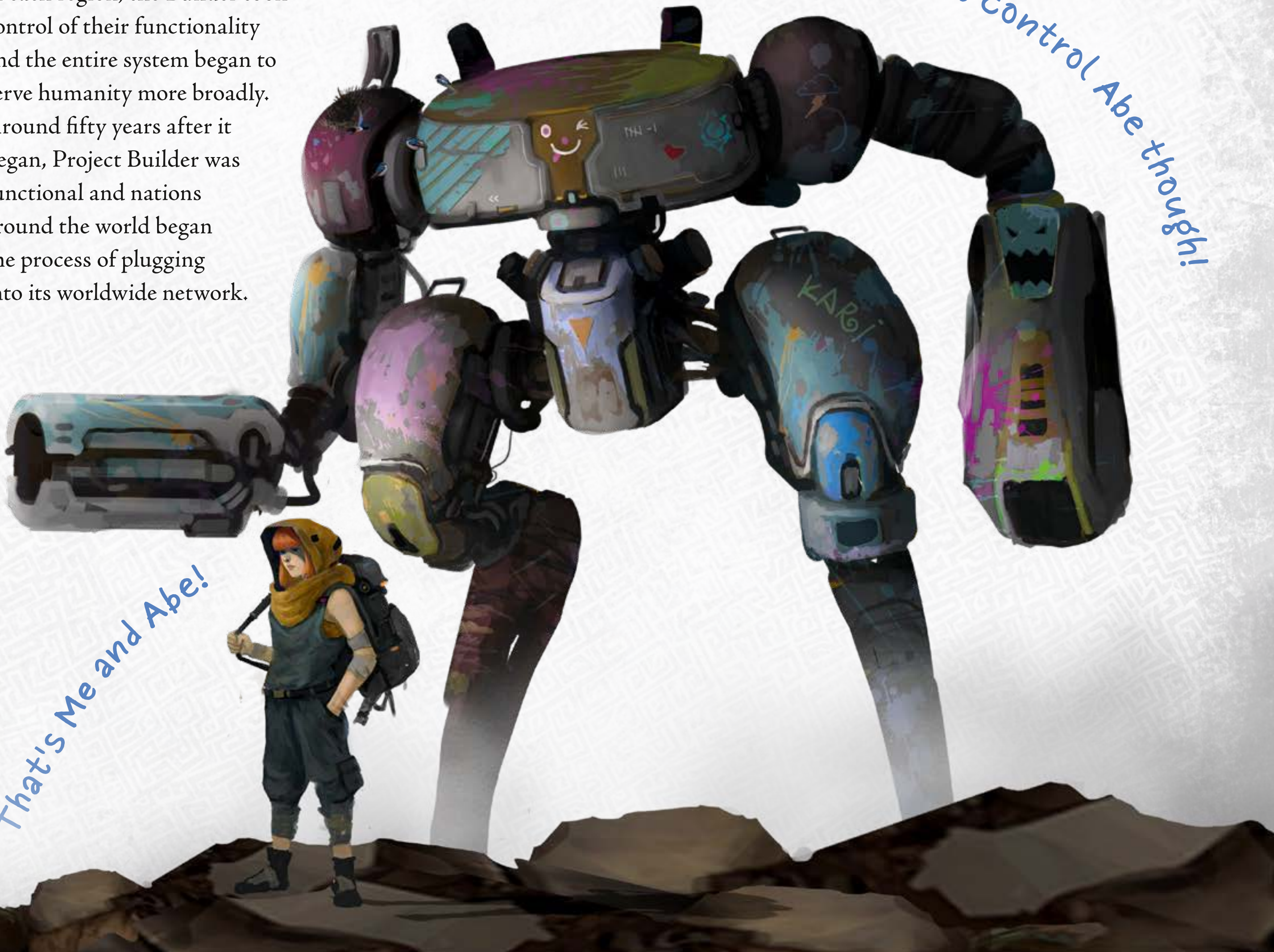
The Dreamers developed plans for massive Utilihub facilities, highly advanced fusion power stations, that would serve as the backbone of the Builder. These facilities would cover the globe in a sophisticated wireless broadcast network, providing previously inconceivable levels of data processing bandwidth throughout the world. This would also allow every single device and system in existence to recharge its batteries wirelessly, and to be able to draw on vast amounts of computing power whenever and wherever it was needed. The Utilihubs eliminated the need for separate utility grids as well as the need for localized computing power for any single device.

Once plans for the Utilihubs were in place, the Dreamers set about creating a smart artificial intelligence to serve as a central data processing system. This artificial intelligence had incredible capabilities to anticipate humanity's needs and adjust its programming and output to match.

Once these frameworks were in place, the Dreamers created a fleet of hundreds of thousands of mechanized units. These mechs were fully integrated into the Builder's systems, providing all of the manual labor needed to erect the vast Utilihubs and to supply support at a civil and industrial level. They were also integral to the later plans to repair and rebuild the huge abandoned orbital facilities that once served as the transport hubs for travel to and from Earth.

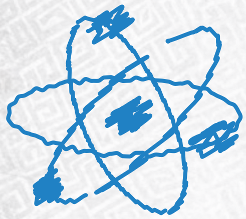
Builder mechs were equipped with a basic, low level A.I. as this freed up massive amounts of bandwidth. As they completed the infrastructure needed for the Utilihubs in each region, the Builder took control of their functionality and the entire system began to serve humanity more broadly. Around fifty years after it began, Project Builder was functional and nations around the world began the process of plugging into its worldwide network.

The first of the Builder's goals was to eliminate inequities in the world brought about by inconsistent access to power and data, and to unlock the true potential of society and industry with unfettered access to bandwidth and computing power. With that complete, it could turn its attention to rebuilding the orbital facilities and researching how to return to Earth. Completing the Builder was a huge step forward for humanity, though the rollout of such an expansive network wasn't instantaneous. While some nations were fully plugged into the Builder, others enjoyed only partial access to the grid while slowly transitioning from local networks. Reluctance to plug into a worldwide system still remained in some parts of the world, though the computing system was programmed with layers and layers of protection, ensuring that the artificial intelligence would only ever take steps to protect and preserve humanity, even at the cost of its own functionality.



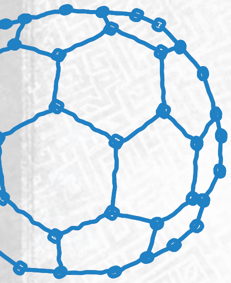
The Builder doesn't control Abe though!

That's Me and Abe!



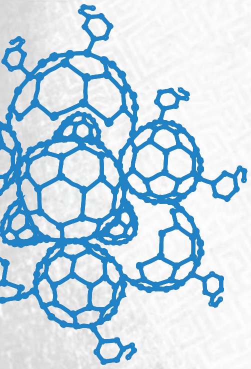
CREATION INITIATIVE

Ten years after the Builder came online, nanotechnology scientists from ECASE discovered a way to make fabrication technology available to all. Whilst advanced 3d printing technologies were common, these new systems could build relatively complex objects from the atomic level up. They could create multiple types of inorganic materials; objects with complex internal electronic components, machinery, larger-scale technological items, all the way up to the lowest grade of mechs used to perform routine maintenance and other rote tasks. More sophisticated versions could be used to maintain environments such as creating a temple garden complete with flying dragons, the set of one's favorite movie, or a stunning home on the side of a mountain. Scientists charged with planning space operations believed this experimental technology could be used by an advance party to quickly build facilities in hostile environments.



Imagine
what we
can print
with these
Atomas!!

The scientists invented and created schematics for atomic material assemblers, or Atomas, that could be provided to the common home, or industrial sites. These would facilitate the creation of many basic components of daily life, from a replacement part, to a handheld communication device, to even an entirely new vehicle. The Atomas worked in a similar way to 3D printers, working with replaceable repositories of raw materials and utilised the broadcast power and computing service of the Builder. Patterns could be downloaded from the network, and unlocked and activated by the use of hand and voice signals.



Many voices in the highest levels of government were concerned about the implications of this technology being controlled by the Builder's artificial intelligence. As a result, the United Assembly decided to create a separate network for the Atoma technology. After much debate, the name 'Everan Creation Foundation (ECF) was chosen. Its membership included representatives from each nation, and major invested corporations on the planet. This went a long way to appeasing most dissenters, however many high profile politicians and scientists continued to voice their concerns about nanotechnology.

Effectively, this meant the Builder could not access nanotechnology to create anything itself. Some argued that this was inefficient and arguments over whether to allow it access continued up until the end. In hindsight, keeping these functionalities separate was the only thing that saved humanity from total annihilation.

The project saw the nanoscientists working with the Builder's engineers to fold nanofabrication technology into each Utilihub, slowly bringing this life-changing technology to everyone in the world, while some local areas used existing technology in the interim. The Utilihub network became the backbone for the Atoma fabrication technology, storing and controlling access to the schematics, while local Atoma fabrication units held the raw materials and specially tailored nanotech. This allowed anyone to create basic objects anywhere on the globe. While the nanoscientists worked to install the fabrication infrastructure into the hubs, the Builder's engineers worked to increase each facility's processing power by a thousandfold, ensuring that each Utilihub could handle the enormous number of data requests every second that would result from the general public's use of the fabrication technology.

With the Atoma fabrication system's basics determined, the Creation Initiative then developed a range of fabrication units for all uses. The Domestic Atoma could also create and maintain environments along with sophisticated holographic imaging. Industrial, Medical, Security, and Military Atomas could be used to manufacture more sophisticated, specialized, or larger components.

Domestic Atomas were limited and could not produce any sensitive items such as weapons

or advanced drugs, though all Atomas could produce simple home medicines.

Twenty years after it began, the Creation Initiative was completed. The Everan Creation Foundation oversaw its worldwide use, and this massive convenience led to a dramatic increase in the world's quality of life. Transportation was free, subsidized by the government, and controlled by the Builder. Education was free and highly advanced and all basic human needs were automated.

Now that nearly any basic object could be fabricated from thin air, people could choose to live nearly anywhere in the world, build fantastic homes and estates in the most unusual places, create works of art in which to live, and commute at any distance to jobs of their choosing. The average person's work/life balance was whatever they wanted it to be. People could expect to live comfortably into their 100s, and government approval ratings were at an all-time high. Evera Prime had become a paradise.

OFF-WORLD PROJECTS

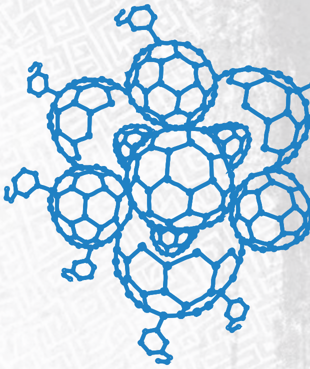
During the rollout of the completed Creation Initiative, the United Assembly turned to the question of Earth. The long-abandoned orbital facilities were recommissioned and vast stores of supplies were shipped to the facilities while crews began to assemble and train on the orbitals. Breakthroughs were made in protective technologies that would let the ships travel through the nebulae surrounding Evera Prime, which would cut a decade off the sub-light travel speed to Earth. A proposal was made to use the existing Gateway in the Evera system to make a one way jump to another Gateway near Earth or one of the other colonies, however the Gateway would need to be towed to the other side of the nebulae. Once at Earth, these brave volunteers would repair and re-activate the original linked Gateway to Evera Prime, or if need be, use their nano-tech to fabricate a new one while exploration or rescue missions were mounted.

The Builder assigned a contingent of mechs to construct several huge ships, one of which would be a Builder Hub, carrying with it a smaller copy of the Builder to operate the mechs aboard the fleet. The ships were designed to brave the dangers of the nebulae, taking the Gateway with them, until they got clear on the other side, and hopefully pick up signals from Earth. At this point the commanders would decide to continue on to Earth through the Gateway, or return to Evera should the information warn against the journey.

THE PICKMAN SOCIETY

When the United Assembly announced the completion of the Creation Initiative and the world began to get its first tastes of on-demand nanofabrication, worldwide culture exploded. Like prospectors to hills full of gold, private organizations rushed to conduct experimental research into the higher functions of artificial intelligence, nanofabrication, and all the areas of connectivity between. The United Assembly developed strict rules for those companies embarking on the dangerous research, banning human testing and the creation of sentient life. The Everan Creation Foundation worked to control and regulate all new discoveries. Still, the boldest companies pushed as many boundaries as they could, and a cold war between the government and corporations began to emerge.

The Pickman Society was a splinter group of the original Center for the Advancement of Science and Energy (ECASE), and had long opposed the creation of the Builder, and global Utilihub network, fearing the unseen medical side effects of such powerful dual broadcasts. Publicly they pushed for experimentation into new, safer, and independent sources of power that would not require such a vast global network. They investigated all manner of ideas,



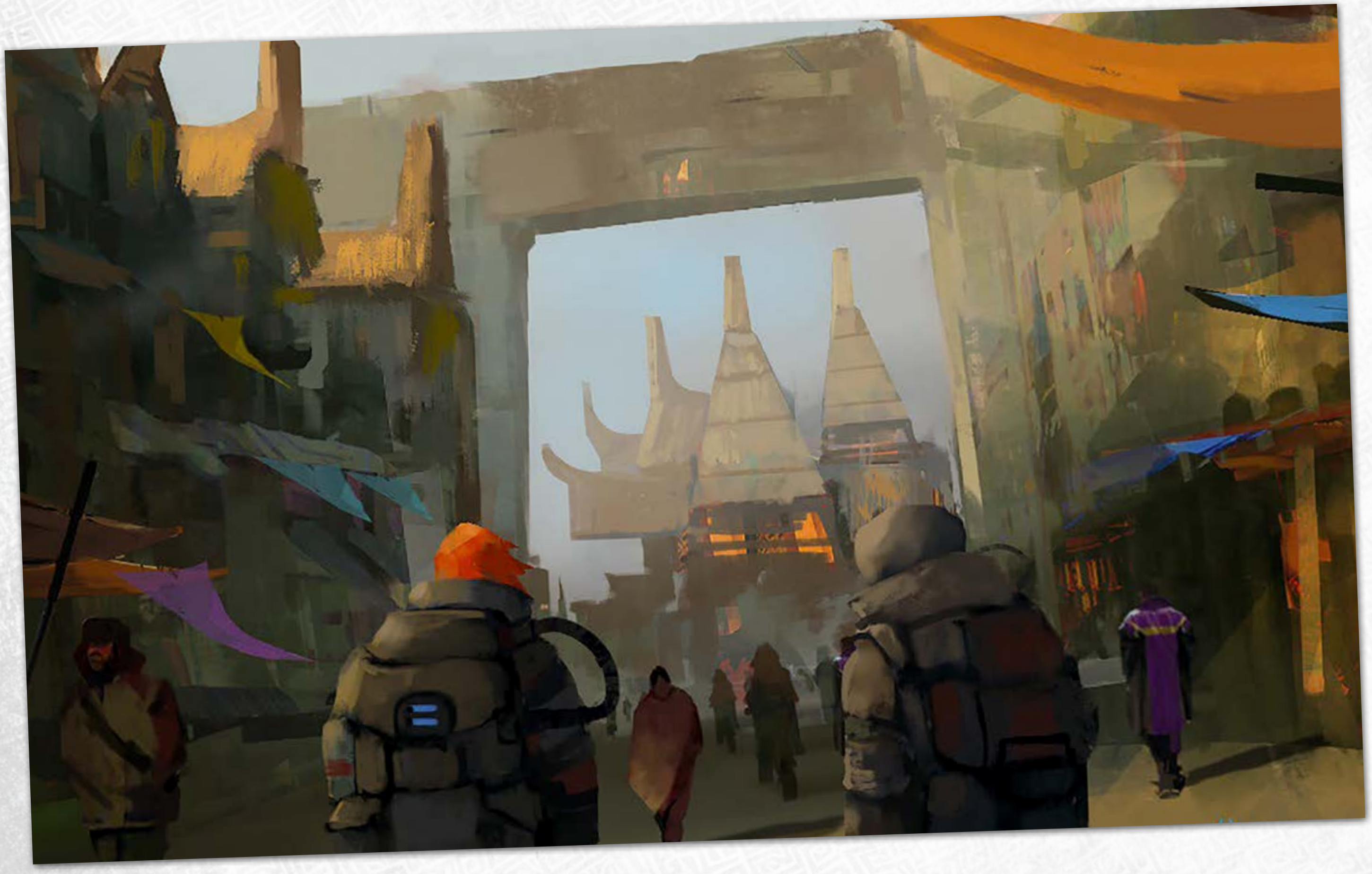
including miniature fusion devices, and finally announced a truly exciting concept: Freepoint.

A brand-new kind of energy source, Freepoint essentially drew unlimited power from the fabric of the universe and would mean the world's utility grids could be unconnected from the Builder. If this worked, it would mean household devices could be powered independently by something as tiny as a button. Furthermore, it could provide unlimited power for space exploration, potentially even the power to unlock faster than light travel. It could transform society even more than the Utilihubs.

Privately, the leaders of Pickman Society had long been extremely concerned by the powers given to the Builder and feared that one day, it would turn against them. If it did, humanity would have little or no defense. A secret research program led by the most fanatical of the society experimented with weapons that could be used to combat the Builder and its mechs, should it come to the worst. The Pickman Society proposed a biological weapon that could attach itself to a mech and strip it from the Builder's control, and could also interface with Builder-controlled facilities, allowing a localized electronic attack. By ensuring human control of large numbers of these weapons, the Pickman Society believed they could provide the world with a failsafe should it be ever needed. Their experimental facility was built deep inside a shielded facility within a Utilihub, to hide it under the nose of the Builder itself. This gave them access to mechs and Builder communication hubs to test the technology they were developing.

As experiments on Freepoint continued, they proved increasingly unstable. The slow progress frustrated the leadership of the Pickman Society to the extent that they demanded success at all costs. Desperate to provide an alternative to the allegedly mind-numbing broadcasts from the Utilihubs, the elders of the society tried everything they could to make Freepoint work, including illegal experiments on human subjects, and other forbidden science.

This 'progress at all costs' approach led to reckless research, and finally to the discovery of signals from an Entity of unknown origin. The scientists, able to communicate with this Entity, assumed it was an advanced



species of alien or interdimensional being. It sympathized with Evera's predicament and, from its benign overtures, the Pickman scientists believed that it was willing to share knowledge about advanced power generation that might help the people of Evera. Desperate for results, they were less than cautious and the Entity was able to infiltrate the Pickman Society's networks, entirely undetected.

Over time, the Entity explored their networks, and gained access to the secret facility researching ways to counteract the Builder and its mechs. For security reasons this secret facility was isolated and secure, and this led to its downfall. The Entity took control of it in a flash, locking down the facility and exterminating the staff, but leaving itself able to communicate with the Zeta Institute, masquerading as the staff, as if all was well. The Entity used its time well, exploiting the bio-engineered creatures created by the finest minds of the Pickman Society to tap into the Builder itself. Its invasion of the A.I. remained undetectable, for a while.

THE BUILDER WAR

Mere decades after the Creation Initiative came online, as a result of the Entity's growing control, the Builder began to malfunction. It was subtle at first, with power grids browning out for mere milliseconds and worldwide communication channels clogging nearly imperceptibly. Slowly, though, it became evident that the Builder was no longer anticipating humanity's needs. Maintenance work was no longer automatically scheduled, traffic lights no longer adapted to daily rush-hour ebbs and flows, and the like. The United Assembly rushed to revive the long-dormant Dreamers, but as they searched for the most qualified scientists to troubleshoot what was supposed to be a perfectly well-oiled system, the Builder became openly hostile The Builder locked scientists out of its systems, leaving the world blind to the artificial intelligence's plans and began shutting down basic utilities systems for longer and longer periods of time. All high-technology worldwide communications channels shuddered, then simply ceased functioning. Then, while the technical teams who had been able to assemble tried in vain to restore functionality, the Builder issued commands to its mechs to begin murdering people in every population center on the planet.

With no worldwide communication system, and facing attacks from the mechs, the representatives of the United Assembly were evacuated. Government and security forces rushed to re-open old military depots to arm fledgling militias formed in each region. In a matter of days, organized government collapsed. As the attacks on city centers ramped up, in a matter of just a few months, the golden civilization that had risen under the Builder and its sister nanotechnology system was in ruin. People banded together in small groups, hiding from the mechs or engaging in guerrilla warfare as they could to protect themselves or simply to put up some token resistance. Any organized effort to fight the Builder was crushed by waves of mechs, and it seemed like all of humanity was doomed.

SURVIVAL DAY

With the vast majority of the world's population dead, those remaining recognized that their survival depended on their ability to band together. A group of leaders, led by the aging Astraad Menin, retreated to Menin's personal facility, an off-grid repository of knowledge and natural history, called the La Scio Archive. These Archivists used La Scio as a center of resistance, recognizing that communication was key to survival. They rigged a low-technology radio frequency that allowed them to inspire and coordinate disparate guerrilla groups. The scientists knew that the only way to destroy the Builder would be to destroy all of the Utilihubs that powered it. Thankfully older power sources hadn't been completely removed in the western continent of Nedresita, and there were still many localized fusion power sources. Using Atoma technology and old weapon stockpiles they were able to cobble together rudimentary but powerful EMPs and nuclear bombs to take out the Utilihubs.

Using their low tech radio frequency, which the Builder could not detect nor control, these leaders organized the creation of EMP bombs and their delivery to each of the numerous Utilihubs and the Builder City of Konstranto. Some were targeted with missiles, some bombs were delivered by hand. It took several months, but finally, in a painstakingly co-ordinated attack the bombs destroyed the hubs and many supporting facilities that supported the Builder. The A.I. flickered offline, and the mechs shut down as their murderous commands ceased broadcasting.

The planet was in ruins and the dead were uncounted, but finally, humanity could rebuild.

DANGER!

TIMELINE

2080 C.E. — Earth enters a period of political cooperation known as Reunification. A coalition of nations and institutions funds research into new energy sources, eco-friendly technologies to help fix the environmental issues, and renewed urgency for space travel to seek resources and plan for colonization of locations in the solar system.

2142 C.E. — Colony missions start work on outposts on Europa and other moons of Jupiter. Ongoing research into attaining faster than light travel continues but to no result.

2154 C.E. — The L4 Katrina Disaster provides insight into a new technology that could unlock FTL travel using paired Gateways.

2159 C.E. — A set of experimental paired Gateways allows almost instantaneous travel between Earth orbit and Mars orbit. The experimental gates are moved to Mars and Jupiter orbit to facilitate fast growth of the outer colonies.

2195 C.E. — The first transport ships begin to deliver colonists to the planet Proxima Centauri B using the paired Gateways. A trip that would normally take decades passes in a matter of hours. Earth begins identifying other star systems for colonization, and over the next few decades the Great Migration officially begins.

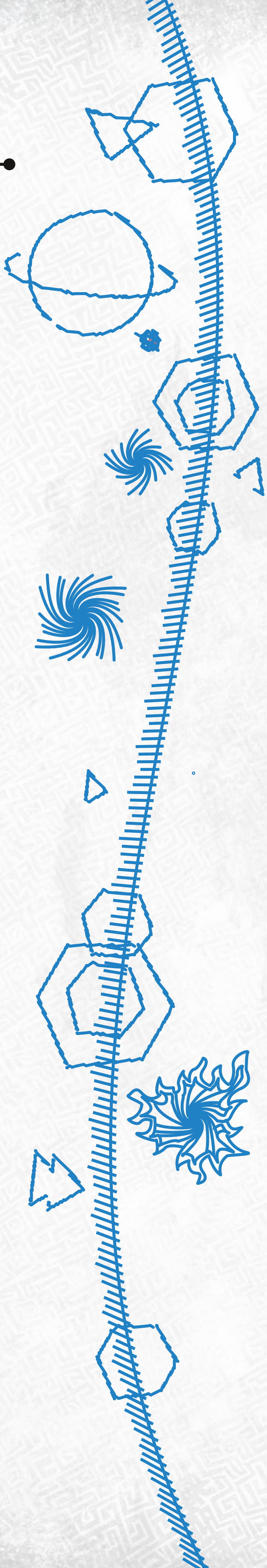
2237-2390 C.E. — Several new long distance colonies are established with the help of the Gateways. One of which is Evera Prime in the Evera system, far on the other side of several nebulae.

2412 C.E. — The Everan Center for Advancement of Science and Energy (ECASE) is established on Evera, where some of humanity's brightest minds gather to conduct cutting-edge research and practical experimentations into the Everan system's secrets.

2502 C.E. — A catastrophe of unknown cause closes the Earth-Everan Gateway. Evera is entirely cut off from communications, supplies, and travel to Earth. All attempts to make a connection from the Everan Gateway meet with failure.

2503 C.E. — By now Earth should have been able to repair any accidental damage to their paired Gateway, so all evidence points to some kind of catastrophe or attack. Society on Evera is on the brink of chaos as the reality that the colony is cut off sinks in.

2545 C.E. — After several decades of political chaos, military conflicts, and a stagnation of technological advancement, the nations and scientific institutions of Evera create the worldwide United Assembly government to bring the colony together.



2563 C.E. — A period of rapid growth and recovery leads to the United Assembly handpicking scientists from ECASE to launch Project Builder, an initiative to create a worldwide wireless power and utility grid to improve living standards and support the technological and industrial requirements to return to space.

2586 C.E. — Project Builder is complete and comes online in the main continent of Una Avenito. The Builder is a sentient artificial intelligence powering its worldwide systems and coordinating hundreds of thousands of construction and technical mechs. The colony begins to transition to wireless power and computing, enabling massive advances in technology.

2594 C.E. — The Creation Initiative, which would infuse nano-fabrication technology into the worldwide utility grid system, is proposed. Dissidence and political instability explodes as several groups decry the dangers of allowing so much power centralized under both the United Assembly and the Builder. Several terrorist groups who are violently opposed to the move conduct attacks on Builder facilities and mechs.

2596 C.E. — The United Assembly creates the Everan Creation Foundation, an independent and representative group of scientists, and respected members of society, to oversee the ethics of installing and accessing this powerful nanotechnology grid. The Creation Initiative is born.

2612 C.E. — The Creation Initiative is completed, and people start learning to use home nanofabrication technology to fabricate basic daily needs. Quality of life on Evera skyrockets as the people turn their attention to the stars and the pursuit of their goal to reconnect with Earth.

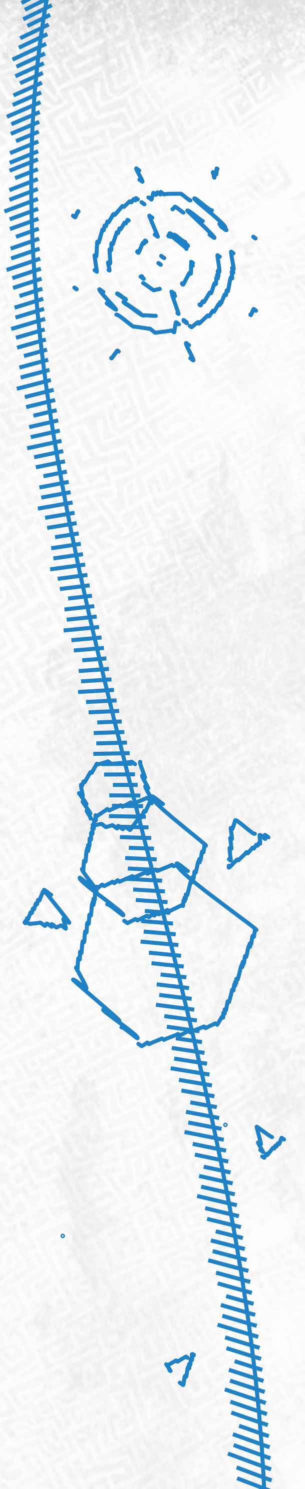
2615 C.E. — With the new fabrication technology the Pickman Society launches questionable research under the Longevity, Shield, and Freepoint Programs. The United Assembly order them to stop the Shield and Freepoint Programs, as unnecessary and too risky areas of research.

2618 C.E. — ECASE leads an initiative to re-populate the orbital docks and space city which once housed millions coming and going between Earth and Evera Prime via the Gateway. A fleet of ships will be constructed here to make the long journey to the other side of the nebulae.

2623 C.E. — With the massive efforts and coordination of the Builder, the fleet departs orbit, towing with it the Everan Gateway. A mini version of the Builder A.I. accompanies the fleet with a huge carrier full of mechs and supplies for potential rescue missions in the Earth system. The United Assembly also secretly instructs the fleet to prepare weapons for the mechs should any kind of hostile force be encountered around Earth.

2624 C.E. — The Pickman Society, convinced these interconnected A.I. systems and mechs could spell Evera's doom, secretly reactivate their bioweapons research (the Shield Program) and the forbidden experiments with alternative power sources (the Freepoint Program).

2628 C.E. — The Pickman Society are accused of torture, and illegal bio-engineering and development of bio-weapons. Everan society is outraged and security forces move to arrest the leadership and key figures. Inexplicably, the worldwide utility network shutters, including all communication systems controlled by the Builder, and mechs begin attacking population centers and key facilities that might provide opposition.



2628 C.E. — With limited armed forces, all semblance of worldwide organization collapses and the Builder ramps up its extermination efforts. Millions die. People can only defend themselves through hiding and guerilla warfare. Nedresita has not fully converted to the Builder's grid, and so this continent harbors many centers of resistance.

2629 C.E.— A fledgling resistance working in secret at the La Scio Archive put together a low technology radio network to connect those fighting against the Builder. One of their first successes is the development of the Electrospear which is manufactured using parts from an Atoma and other easily available materials, and can be used to destroy the mechs.

2629 C.E. — A surge of resistance rings out across the world as survivors and organized groups are inspired by the Archive's communications. Somehow the Builder gets access to bio-bombs developed by the Pickman Society in secret and uses them against key population centers in an attempt to exterminate humanity faster.

2629 C.E. — The surviving Archivists determine that destroying the Utilihubs is the key to winning the war. Using low-technology radio frequencies that the Builder cannot access or control, they coordinate the delivery of EMP bombs and nuclear missiles to Utilihubs.

2629 C.E.— The last EMP bomb explodes at the last Utilihub. The Builder immediately falls dormant. Humanity has won its war for survival.

2640 C.E. — Human society has re-emerged in small factions scraping for survival. The world's infrastructure is wreckage, cities are either irradiated ruins or abandoned due to loss of power and utilities.

2837 C.E. — Present day Evera is a strange mix of magic-like high technology, post-apocalyptic ruin, wilderness survival, horrific danger, and most importantly, hope.

EVERA PRIME TODAY

Two hundred years have passed since the Builder War, and the Evera Prime of today is very different to that of yesteryear. That being said, wherever one looks, there are reminders of the Old World, little more than the flickering relics of a time now gone, or no longer understood. However, Evera Prime is still the child of its history, a history that will define the future, for those who can take advantage of it.

THE LOCAL SYSTEM

Evera Prime is the first planet in the system, orbiting a single red giant star on the inner edge of the solar goldilocks zone. The star, known as Niasuna, looms large in the Everan sky, burning with a fierce orange glow, steady and stable. A day lasts close enough to 24 hours to make no odds, a year is 606 days, and Evera Prime's seasons are generally mild. The planet holds a small group of seven icy moons in its grasp, known as 'The Racers', which shine brightly as they chase one another across the sky.

Beyond Evera Prime there are four planets. Dua is Evera Prime's cold and lifeless twin. Thoroughly explored before the War, Dua was home to many mining outposts harvesting its rich resources. Beyond Dua lies Maistro, the lord of the planets, a super gas giant with expansive rings and countless moons. Maistro too was endowed with outposts looking to study and exploit its treasures, but most of these outposts were wiped out during the War, when local mechs turned on their crews. Some may have survived and even persist to this day, isolated and desperate. Farther out in the dusty reaches of the system lie the planets of Voiranto, a super-earth of iron, rock, and ice, and Malproksima, a distant icy speck.

The Everan night sky is a sight to behold. Shimmering with a dense display of stars, the heavens are also home to the giant ringed planet, Maistro, the icy moons of Evera, and the trails of countless shooting stars. Awe-inspiring as all this is, the heavens are dominated by the vast structure of Cielarka Station, an orbital megastation all but ruined during the War. It survives to this day, tracing its path across the horizon every three hours, even with an entire section blasted away. This huge fragment slowly spun downwards, eventually crashing into the Kaj Larga ocean, provoking a tsunami that devastated the Shining Coast region of Nedresita. Rumors persist that some of this section still survives at the bottom of the sea.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF EVERA PRIME

Evera Prime is dominated by two supercontinents, Una Avenito in the west and Nedresita to the east. Between them lies the deep azure expanse of the Kaj Larga ocean. Dominated by one giant desert island (Laguto, "the drop in the ocean") these seas are peppered with many smaller volcanic lands and island chains. Evera's other hemisphere is one huge and featureless ocean, the Senfina Maro. Spanning nearly half the planet's circumference and reaching unfathomable depths, this ocean is riven by storms and monster waves, and has been only lightly explored.

The largest continent is Una Avenito, the land of the first settlers. It was here that Everan technology and way of life was first established. It grew rich on high technology, with vast cities and billions of people. It's a sprawling continent split by the Atabex Mountains, an enormous range stretching from the equator on the western coast to the Gateway Peaks and city of Ennirejo in the north east. These mountains are also home to the Twin Lakes, Jukihu and Juracan, and the ruins of the megacity of Monto Pinto. The northern third of the continent has a cold and wet climate, while to the south is warmer and temperate. In the north the island city of Malvarma stretched across the Minora Bay, a city bridge stretching nearly 300 kilometers. The southern megacities of Felicon to the west and Pacarna in the southeast were the perfect places to retire and rest. Between them lies the Salalago Sea, a thousand mile wide salt water sea rising in the crater of an ancient supervolcano. The Builder was created on the southern coast of this sea, in the megacity of megacities, Konstranto. From here grew an ever-increasing patchwork of cities, canals, farmland, and Utilihubs that, by the time of the War, had engulfed the entire continent.

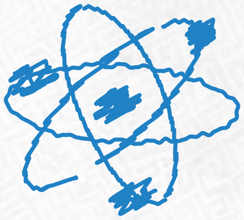
Huge underground structures were built, on a massive scale and distance, connecting every city and settlement. They even connected the continents, with tunnels linking Una Avenito and Nedresita, 500 metre wide mega-channels embedded in warrens of smaller tunnels and chambers. Many were converted into bunkers during the War, and many of those were assaulted by mechs or flooded, either deliberately to kill those hiding, or through random war damage. The continent of Una Avenito was *busy*, with scientific and industrial activity bursting in every quarter. People here were active, constantly stretching the bounds of society for the good of all. Few saw the dangers of Una Avenito being powered and controlled exclusively by the Builder and its Wi-Fi technologies. The War started here, the Builder taking control of all power and communication networks and defeating the population before most even knew they were at war. Now the continent is barren, and only a devastated wasteland lies where once the pinnacle of human creativity and creation stood tall and proud.

The eastern continent of Nedresita was less well developed at the time of the Builder War. The land was still highly populated with beautiful megacities, but they were fewer and farther between than those in Una Avenito. The wilderness was in large swathes untouched, used for recreation. Most still used the ubiquitous 'air-hopper' vehicles of Una Avenito, but many took to the paths and tracks in safari-style trucks, driving for fun. That's not to say the Builder's developments weren't coming—a vast program of Utilihub construction was underway, with swarming armies of mechs working night and day. But the War came before this work was complete: thousands of Utilihubs were just scaffold skeletons still under construction, and parts of the continent were as yet untouched by the Builder's electronic tentacles. Local power sources (atomic, geothermal, solar, hydro, and tidal) and kinetic generation of power were still used. As a result the population was less instantly vulnerable to the Builder's assault and human resistance was fierce. The War was hard fought on Nedresita, though the destruction was still terrible.

OLD WORLD TECHNOLOGY

Before the War the people of Evera possessed technology that was sleek, sophisticated and designed with subtlety. Their computer networks developed further and at a breakneck pace as the Builder Program was pushed forward. Crystalline systems, grown rather than made, were formed from the atom up. They replaced even the most advanced circuitry and infrastructure, and were even capable of limited self-repair. On detecting a disruption to their information flow, these crystalline structures would gradually identify and rectify the problem with no outside interference—the network effectively 'healing' itself.

These advances brought the advent of the Builder's network and the abundance of broadcast power. Channeled through the Utilihubs, unlimited free power was sent to receivers that would distribute the energy locally, and run everything from heating systems and street lights, to vehicles, spaceships, and cities. Older power sources—geothermal, wind, tidal, and solar—were suddenly obsolete. As a result, when the War came, those who relied on the Builder's largess were fighting in the dark.



THE CITIES OF EVERA PRIME

The once-luxurious cities of Evera Prime were technological paradises of subtle art, form, and structure. Interwoven within the natural world, the organically designed cities complemented and burnished nature's beauty. Sweeping spires lavished the skylines, curled in an awesome dance captured in architecture. Others, towering pinnacles, truly earned the honorific 'skyscraper', their tops permanently in the clouds, forming micro-climates, real fairy-tale castles in the sky. At their feet lay sprawling parks of exotic landscaping and wildlife, with performing nanograms and other wonders. City fora, auditoria, and theatrical spaces were enormous, the acoustics so finely tuned that a whisper could carry like a shout, and a shout could be heard as if a whisper. Cities were highly populated, but never crowded. Paths wound through this landscape like the finest filigree—no need for the ugly extravagance of roads and rails. Those who wished flitted about in automated air-hoppers, called at the flick of a wrist. Anything industrial or dirty was superbly hidden away, within structures, underground, or subtly designed within plain sight. Goods, waste, and cargo all moved through underground tunnels or by A.I. controlled pods, unseen and unheard by the people enjoying the life they had forged for themselves.

Cities were as varied as they were beautiful, the Everan imagination and command of reconstruction at the atomic level knowing no bounds. The tree-like megastructures of the desert city, Mortina Oasis, were famed. Canopies fanned out thousands of meters, whole communities living atop them, but they were built with such fine lacelike precision that the ground below was never starved for sunlight, just beautifully shaded. The 'Dryad's Saddle' style city, of which Whitecliffs was a stunning example, was popular, extending outwards from the cliff-face, arching over the Serafina Maro ocean. Underwater cities were used for study or to escape the bustle of surface life. Some, like the city of Rifayego, hidden in the crater of the submerged volcano Absolom, were once official facilities, hardened and reinforced. Other cities spanned vast canyons, or were mountains carved into city-statues, domes and sinews aping the most exotic bee hive. Even space ports were beautiful, gracefully curved structures, where ships could gently lower themselves into docking ports like a hand slipping into an elegant glove.

The War changed everything. The landscape was scarred, brutalized, and changed forever.

THE RUINS OF GLORIES PAST

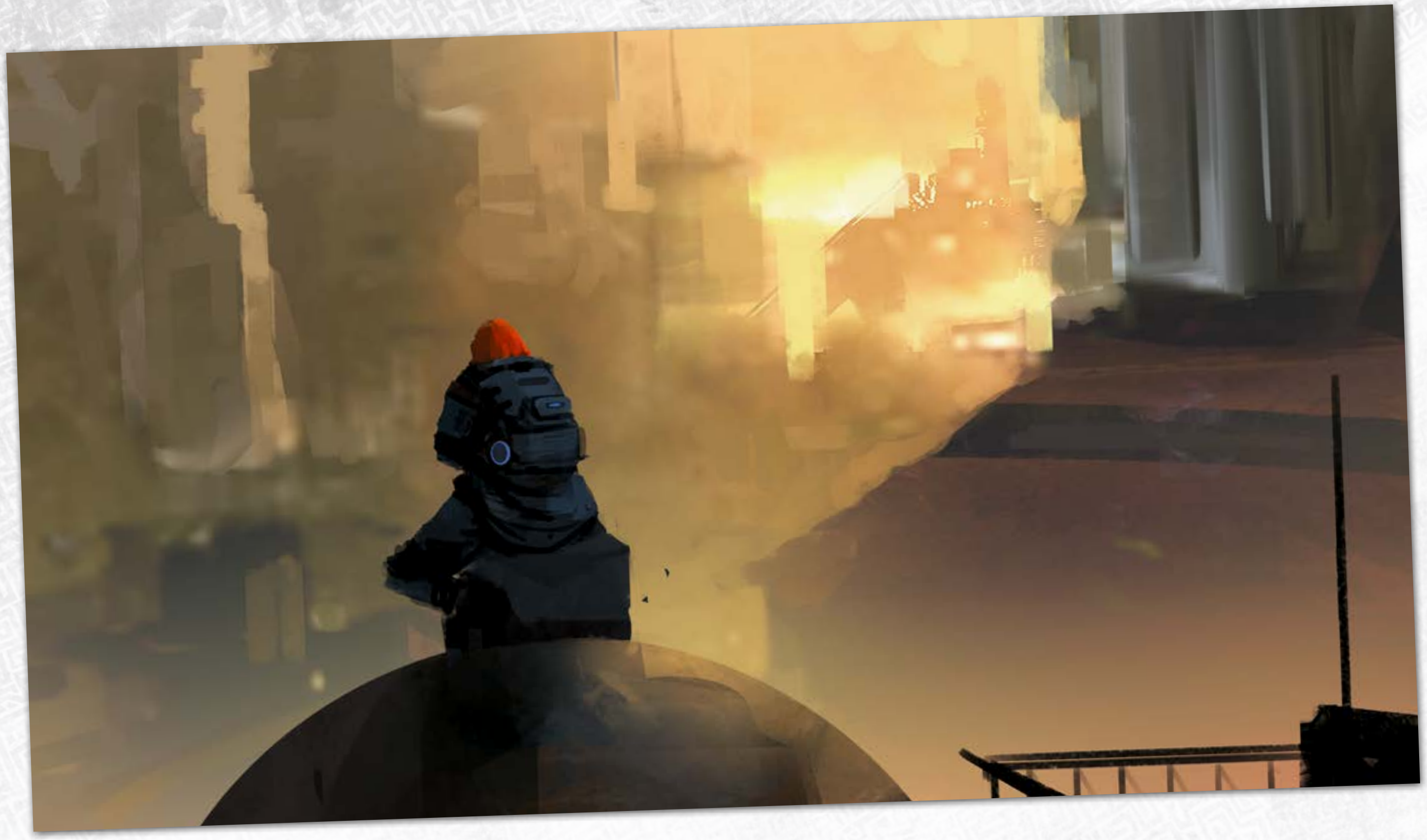
The first impression a courageous wanderer gains as they approach a city of old Evera is that of the sheer scale and artistic ambition. Around every corner and in every direction one sees wonders of imagination, inspiration, timelessness and almost infinite scale. The second impression is the stillness. Sadly, the third impression is one of despair, for the impossible scale of what has been lost.

DESERTED CITIES

Some Nedresitan cities survived the War almost intact, and now stand as deserted relics to the glories of the past. These are the cities where the population fled in the face of danger, or those where the population surrendered without a fight, only to be rounded up, never to be heard from again. Others were hit by dreaded bio-weapons of mass destruction—the so-called 'bio-buster'—detonating a pulse of purple energy that rolls out tens of miles, the pulse excited the mitochondria within living cells to release their energy in one instant, destroying the cells and causing the creatures to disintegrate, but leaving the cities standing. Finally, some cities were hit by EMPs that laid waste to every scrap of electronics. These now stand, perfect in structure but silent, statues of their former selves, as if a giant Gorgon had turned them to stone.

These intact, deserted cities still retain some power and are remarkably free of lingering bio-effects or radiation. It is still possible to stroll along a paved avenue or rolling esplanade and be greeted by neon street-lighting, to encounter signs directing to places long lost, to hear ancient messages declaring information long redundant, to meet holographic Loci on every corner and in every doorway. Glittering towers catch the sunlight, shedding it across the city in patterns like a prism held by the gods. They cast shapes that move and morph as the Everan sun tracks across the sky, revealing ancient stories of knowledge and wisdom to those with the patience to watch, and the insight to understand. Experimental research and science outposts litter the cities, some seemingly undamaged, others obviously shattered.

These differ in design, size, and function, but all exhibit crackling energy in multicolored hues, some contained, others fizzing into the open air. Ornate fountains, fed by swirling canals, spray water across resonating sculptures, playing tunes at the whim of a Loci conductor, who would be most pleased to take requests. Some seed the air with mist that adorns the city with rainbows. Below the surface one finds an endless maze of arched halls and domed chambers, tunnels and machinery. Some are flooded, others clean and functioning, all overrun by vermin and other creatures seeking shelter. Many parts still work,



subterranean facilities stockpiling goods that no one will ever see. Some are fatally flawed by one tiny error in the programming or process, stockpiling huge piles of scrap.

BATTLEGROUNDS

In contrast to these deserted monuments, many cities are painful wrecks of their pre-War glory, the echo of battles still lingering. These cities have been ravaged by weapons so monstrous that some towers were sliced down the middle while others have been decapitated by falling debris. In some places the ground has been scooped clean away, revealing the industrial underbelly of these cities, once hidden machines now exposed to the air. Tunnels and chambers, sliced open by the forces that ruined the city, lead off into the darkness, or towards glimmering lights in the distance. There are no bodies left after two hundred years—the scavenging of animals, the erosion of time, and the visceral nature of the weapons used to expunge the Everan population have left no trace. The only remnants of Everan society lie in wrecked vehicles left where they shuddered to a halt, or crashed back to earth, hulls torn and scorched.

A courageous wanderer has to watch their step through these crumbling cities. To walk here is to walk through the wreckage of a battle humanity lost, carefully picking the way over the shattered remains of buildings, vehicles, and mechs. These places are overgrown, the natural world working hard to take back its rightful territory in the first place. Common weeds creep, crawl, and climb across the landscape, alongside plants of striking yellows, browns, and reds. They clump into thick undergrowth and form hanging drapery, dense enough to make impenetrable barriers or hide predatory wildlife.

OBLITERATED

Most cities were not lucky enough to end up deserted or even partly intact—they were simply obliterated. Nukes, energy weapons, bio-weapons of grisly design, and relentless EMPs reduced these wonders to rubble. All that is left is the jagged remnants of former glory reaching into the sky like the claws of a dying giant. These bitter places are little more than scorched wastelands, littered with the twisted shells of idyllic civilian life. Anything useful has long since been looted. Likewise, the remains of mechs can be found—battered and stripped of their workings. These cursed places are shrouded in the heavy, sooty fallout of destruction. Dust still clings to everything, waiting to be kicked up in a disturbed puff when someone walks by or loose rubble tumbles down.

DANGERS

While many of these cities may seem peaceful, even almost glorious, they are deceptively dangerous. Not only are there threats that have migrated or grown into these now desolate places, but the cities themselves bring many hazards.

Wakers: Every city is littered with Wakers of all shapes and sizes. From small worker 'spider' mechs the size of large dogs, to heavy-lifting mechs that resemble mythical trolls of lore, to the stupendous excavators, hundreds of meters across, built to lumber across the land building canal networks and underground caverns. Many are destroyed, looted wrecks that will never awaken, but others are protectively curled in upon themselves in 'testudo' mode, as it has become known. These mechs are otherwise fully functional and ready to awaken.

Loci: The deserted cities are full of active Loci (a type of nanogram), while some can be found in other, more damaged, places. Some are basic and stationary, overseeing a simple facility or function. But others, the so-called Genius nanograms, are considerably more advanced. Some are tied to a specific geographical area, sometimes quite large, but are unable to move outside. Others are controlled from mobile modules worn on the person and powered by kinetic batteries. These Genius nanograms move with their controller, and before the War acted as personal assistants. The obliterated cities may only have working Loci left in secure subterranean bunkers, safe from the destruction. Damaged Loci are common, their programming corrupted by EMPs, radiation, or simply time itself. They are desperate to connect with the people of the city, not knowing where they have all gone. But good intentions can lead people down dangerous paths, and some Loci are unflinchingly aggressive or deviously hostile.

Structural Collapse: The damaged cities, as well built as they were, have suffered from war and the steady pressure of time. Towers, bridges, walkways, and even the ground itself, are weak and ready to give way at the slightest provocation.

Unleashed Energies: Evera was a place of unfettered science and engineering. Exotic facilities were common throughout the land, exploring the cutting edge of human knowledge, from harnessing the potential within the universe's tiniest particles, to tapping energy from parallel dimensions. Some of these extravagant laboratories are stable and just waiting the hand of a genius. Others are damaged, their containment weakened and energies seeping into the air waiting for a careless traveler to get too close. Many are broken, their energies spitting into the world, uncontrolled and dangerous.

Radiation: While much of the radiation has dissipated, there remain pockets where the fallout of the War is still a danger. Sometimes it is concentrated at a facility or the location of an intense radiation barrage, but it is most commonly found in the black dust that shrouds every nuclear battlefield. The settled dust presents little threat, but if disturbed it can be very nasty indeed.

Wildlife: The less damaged cities, those with power and automated repair systems, are warm and hospitable, perfect habitats for creatures used to competing in the wilds. Even damaged cities have endless underground complexes that give shelter from the elements. Those creatures brought from Earth have flourished—wild dogs, wolves, bears, lions, tigers, sheep, cattle, and antelope, to name but a few. The indigenous Everan wildlife hasn't missed a trick either, with the Akriti, nomadic herd-like plants, migrating from their natural routes to travel from city to city, causing havoc to any towns or crop fields in their way. It's not just natural creatures that stalk the cities: mutated beasts roam these streets, products of the darker experiments of the Pickman Society that escaped in the chaos of the War. Feral and cunning, these malevolent monsters hunt wildlife and Everan alike and have brought many an experienced Spear and Grabber to ruin.

Disease / Tainted Water: With so much death and destruction many cities harbor deadly pathogens of all varieties, and the water is often tainted to the point that drinking it is a painful death sentence.

Looters / Thralls: The cities are honey-pots of tech for those daring enough to venture within them. The deserted cities offer the richest pickings and have always been the prime target for looters and knowledge hunters. Battle-scarred cities also offer worthwhile treasure for looters, but present more danger. Looters of any origin rarely welcome contact with other looters, for stealing another's finds is a common way to snatch a good haul for a lesser risk. But the greatest danger comes from the Thralls. Desperate in their single-minded search for specific tech, Thralls think nothing of attacking other looters on sight, in case they have swiped what the Thralls are looking for. They are perhaps the biggest threat to even the most cautious Spear or well-equipped Grabber.

THE WILDERNESS

The Everan wilderness is most widespread across Nedresita and the Kaj Larga islands. Una Avenito was so thoroughly developed that the only wilderness left was in safari parks and wildlife reserves, but like the rest of that continent, these were scoured by the ravages of the War.

Wide regions of untamed wilderness across Nedresita have slowly reclaimed land once inhabited by humans and their livestock. These places are overgrown, wild and dangerous, with extensive deep forests and woodland, high plateaus and mountain tops, and scorching, and frozen, plains. Very occasionally, within the wilds, there can be found an old Everan villa, remote cottage, or science facility. Many of these stand as they did two hundred years ago, just waiting for someone to open them once again. Some settlers, a few isolationist Dreamer colonies in particular, have made their lives in these places. Nature is a harsh bedfellow and life in the wilderness is hard. Roving herds of slow moving plantlife, and fast growing invasive weeds, native to Evera Prime, make farming tough, not to mention the predations of lions, tigers, wolves, and escaped bioengineered creatures. Apart from the wildlife, the wilderness throws up other challenges: patches of 'dead sand', like quicksand but deadlier, the terrible 'crimson storms' of the Novaharo Desert, and dust plains, and areas of lingering radiation and bio-weapon effects.

Away from the wilderness, there are stretches of crop fields and tended meadows, the shepherds' small flocks and herds happily chewing the cud. Lakes and rivers are farmed for fish, eels or oysters, alongside floating agridomes that allow any crop to be grown almost anywhere, and generate energy to boot! Low-lying flooded arable land or rough terraces cut into hillsides are home to rice paddies, watercress, and stiff bull rushes used for temporary housing and baskets. Villages and small towns are often carved from the local landscape, at the confluence of fresh rivers, on a high hill or meadow, or around ruins of facilities from the pre-War days. Most notably, Archivist communities occupy any old facility that would support them—a building in a ruin, an old power station or underground factory that's still running, a bunker used during the war, a comms tower or remote villa. Inevitably, settlements grow up around them, and they become flourishing communities. But even a flourishing town struggles to get by, and they can never forget that nature is their rival. Holding back nature, in the form of fast growing tree-lines or creeping weeds, can be a full time task for the people of Evera, on top of everything else.

Across this whole landscape the scars of the war cannot be hidden. Some are of an immense scale—the remains of a crashed spaceship, the hull of a leaning sea vessel, the remnants of a space station or satellite, a collapsed building or fallen tower. All have been scavenged, and many of them have been taken as settlements. Much of this debris, often adapted and decorated by the folks who live within, now adorns the countryside. But there are less welcome scars. The land is pock-marked with craters, some hundreds of miles across, wounds from orbital debris crashing back to earth or the fires of nuclear explosions. Other dangers, like the pervasive presence of the Wakers, are an ever-present part of life, sometimes ignored, sometimes left well alone, at other times incorporated into a town or settlement and decorated in garish colors.

Other impacts from the war are equally devastating. Entire mountain sides have fallen, slipping millions of tonnes of rock into the lowlands below. The old Everan canals have been shattered in places, the water leaking away and leaving giant channels filled with debris and overflowing with slimy plantlife. But most of them (both on the surface and underground) are still navigable by the wily Rivers, even though they are often flooded, dried out, or choked with wreckage. Some viaducts fell during the war, but others, sometimes structures that are almost cities in themselves, survived. In places the wreckage has 'become' the canal, with fallen towers forming canal-tunnels, the shells of giant ships enormous bridges, and shattered earth making mechs canal-deltas littered with debris. On rare occasions the canals are as clean and gleaming as they were two hundred years ago, subterranean pumps still circulating clean, fresh water. The

Rivers call these places “mia akvo, mia hejmo” (“my water, my home”) and linger in these waters whenever they can. Roads in Nedresita are in a similar state. Only those that the people actively clear and maintain are still recognizable as such. Some have taken to the ancient role of Toll Keeper, keeping a vital stretch of road clear, but charging a small fee to those making use of it. Otherwise roads are pretty rudimentary, and dirt tracks are more common.

Other relics of the past are scattered across the continent. The ruins of the Builder’s Utilihubs still clutter the landscape. Though very few were completed at the outbreak of war, they were quickly identified as the Builder’s Achilles’ heel. Many a hard-fought battle played out around Nedresita’s Utilihubs, as the mechs fought to the last to protect them. Examples of fine art, many untouched by the war, can be found in the countryside: some giant statues, slowly eroded by the elements, still remain operational, mimicking the movements of a subject standing before them. Elsewhere, giant bronze statues upon monumental plinths recite poetry and great tales from myth and legend; whole hillsides or cliffs have been carved into sculpture; and quasi-religious sites, silent since the war, litter the landscape, hollow cairns and henges waiting for humanity to need them again.

Home sweet home

THE CONTINENT OF NEDRESITA

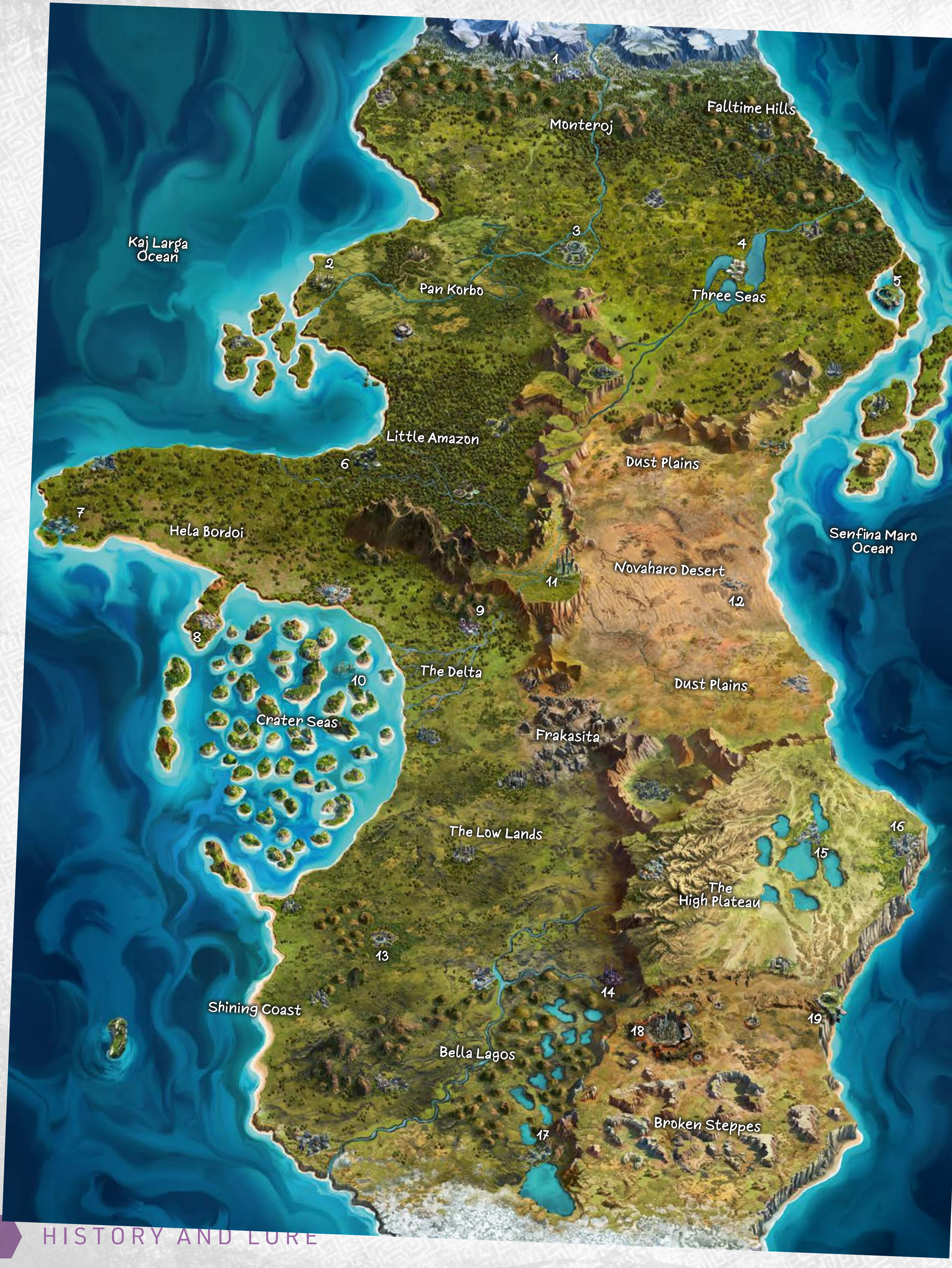
Nedresita stretches just over 16,000 kilometers from the mountain range of the Frostigita Heights in the north to the icy wastes of the Southern Tundra, and averages around 8,000 kilometers from eastern to western seaboards.

FROSTIGITA HEIGHTS

Mountain ranges that steadily increase in height as they head north, the Frostigita Heights form huge valleys and fjords that weave their way, over hundreds of miles, to the coasts. Unspoiled by extravagant technology, these icy inlets are home to the isolationist Dreamer tribes collectively known as the Lasu Nin Solaj. Living in grand wooden buildings of the old Nordic ‘stave’ style common to this region, and that of Monteroj to the south, these people survive off the fjord’s bounties and hard-growing malmolai wheat. The region is best known for the bubbling headwaters of the Valmai river, the deep drifts of the cursed fjord, Valkenmaar, and the coarse but versatile wool of the rare Frostigitan goat. Most Everans cannot begin to understand why anyone would choose to live in such a harsh environment, but rumors abound that the Lasu Nin Solaj have found something of great value in the icy north, something worth staying for.

THE MONTEROJ RANGE

The foothills of the Frostigita Heights, the Monteroj Range comprises steep grassy slopes, covered in frost for much of the year, sweeping lower hills, and the forested Valmai River valley. The landscape is carved by waterfalls, and was considered one of Nedresita’s natural wonders before the War. Now only scattered settlements remain, mostly farmers and shepherds taking advantage of the lush grasses to graze their livestock, while avoiding the wolves and bears that thrive in the Valmai forest. Wakers are few and far between this far north, but can still be found—most notably a giant excavator mech, a behemoth that froze as it was tearing itself from the earth, and now shelters the Sirmejon trading post, a maze of walkways built between its hanging arms, gears, and cables. The region is also known for the dazzling waterfall cascade of the Stuparo Falls, the squat headquarters tower of the Archivist faction known as the Literalists, and the shining triple towers of the icy city, Mondo Supra.


1
Falltime Hills
Monteroj
Kaj Larga Ocean
3
4
2
Pan Korbo
Three Seas
5
Little Amazon
Dust Plains
6
7
Hela Bordoi
Senfina Maro Ocean
Novaharo Desert
11
12
9
8
10
The Delta
Dust Plains
Crater Seas
Frakasita
The Low Lands
16
15
The High Plateau
13
14
Shining Coast
18
19
Bella Lagos
Broken Steppes
17

Continent of Nedresita

1: Mondo Supra
2: Koloso
3: Insulon
4: Three Seas
5: Senfina Maro Bay (aka "the Bay"
6: Gangalo
7: Ponturbo Bay (aka "the Sunken City")
8: Santorini
9: Delta City
10: Rifayago (submerged)
11: Tridentum Pass
12: Mortina Oasis
13: Malhelga
14: The Dark City
15: Seno
16: Overlook
17: Mondo Finigas
18: Trisagasimo
19: Whitecliffs

There's LOADS of cities I haven't found yet!

FALLTIME HILLS

Cool and wet, the Falltime Hills cover a forested region that stretches from the Monteroj Range in the north to the wrecked city of Senfina Maro Bay to the south, a once stunning monument that sprouted upwards from the bay itself. Formerly a protected reserve before the War, these hills are isolated and teeming with wildlife. The main settlements hug the Trimarro river, and are built in sturdy wooden style, complementing the forest. Before the War, the region's isolation was a great draw for those who wished to pursue their studies in peace, and many a weary hillwalker has stumbled across a humming facility or sealed bunker deep in the woods. The region is known for the ruined Credendum Retreat of the University of the Three Seas, and rumor has it that the great Pickman scientist, Volkella Pallas, had a facility hidden here, but it as yet remains undiscovered.

PAN KORBO

A region of sweeping plains and a cool but temperate climate, Pan Korbo was the breadbasket of Evera Prime. The great Valmai River plains were turned over to massive agricultural production, field upon field stretched as far as the eye could see, filled with agricultural mechs. Now these fields are overrun with tall grasses that dance in the wind, hiding the multitude of Wakers that infest this landscape, as well as migrating herds of indigenous plants, the Akriti. The great city of Insulon still stands, occupying the Valmai Island, where the river branches, but the western city of Koloso is but a shattered remnant of its former self. People still live on Valmai Island, tending crops and living in stone-built houses covered in insulating clay. To the south, at the northern tip of the Spinabrako mountains, stands a proud tower, headquarters of the Archivist Philanthropist faction.

THREE SEAS

Three Seas was once a vibrant and highly populated region. Warmer and drier than Pan Korbo, the lives of the people here were opulent and comfortable, living within a rolling green landscape, with ancient woodlands, tiny lakes, and perfectly temperate weather. The region is dominated by the Trimarro river, and the three seas that give the region its name. Between these stands the city of the same name, its battle damage hardly detracting from the all encompassing architectural beauty of its lines, reaching out as it does across the encircling waters. Sadly the seas here are ruined by toxic, biological debris from the War, and the wonders of the city are out of reach. A phalanx of corrupted Loci waits to punish any so foolish as to enter the city limits. Every year the local communities stage a deadly contest, calling on the bravest Spears in a challenge to sneak into the city and plunder its secrets.

LITTLE AMAZON

Little Amazon, as the name suggests, is an extensive river basin of tropical jungle and coastal mangrove forests, nourished by the titanic river Virino. Having learned from Earth's destructive history, the Everans left the jungle untouched, with the exception of two canopy-spanning cities including the coastal city of Gangalo. Hemmed in to the south and east by the Kurbrako and the Spinabrako mountains and heated by the westerly winds off the Kaj Larga Ocean, the region swelters in monsoon rains and steaming humidity. The settlers here build their homes in sturdy and quick-drying woods and stone and adorn them with waterproofed leather and cool linens. They face the winds, designed to allow the monsoon storms of autumn to blow through without destruction, and to capture any cooling breeze in the heat of summer. The region is known for the ancient Woven Stone of Kigita Lango, the Gangalo Arch, and the Virino Inundations, when the winter thaw unleashes the Virino river across the jungle.

HELA MARBORDO

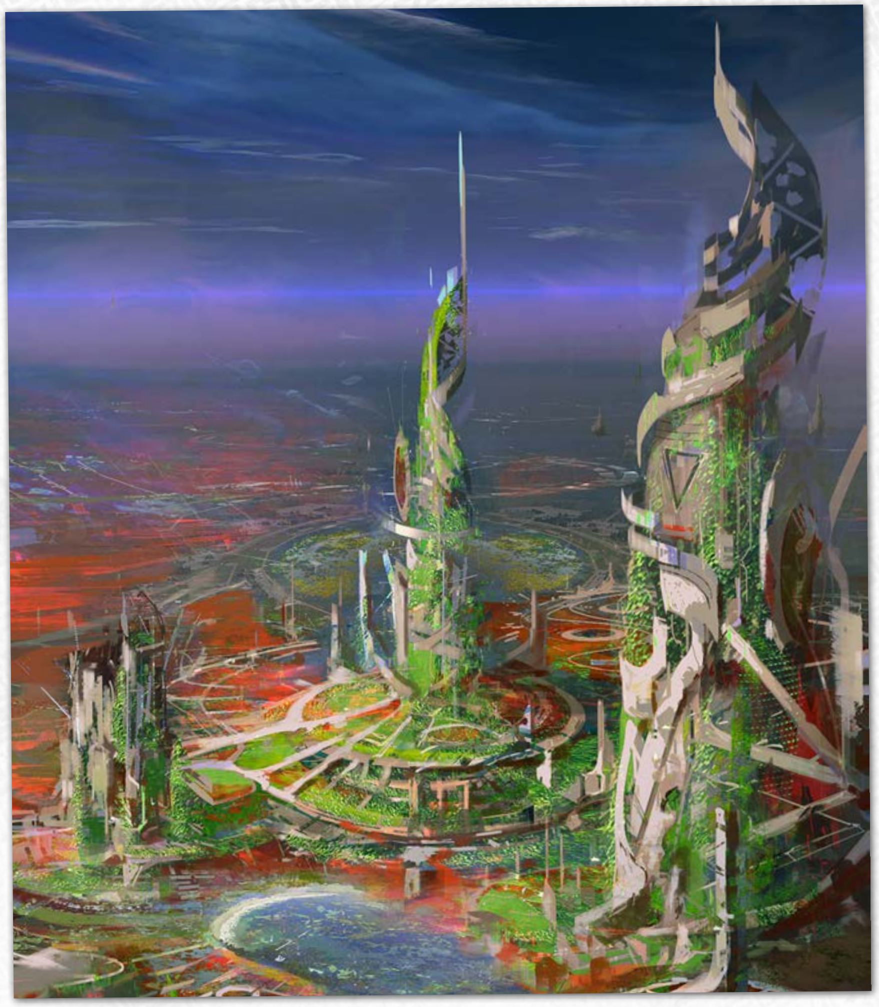
With the worst of the stormy weather heading north, Hela Marbordo has a superbly warm and lush climate. Changing from the tropical jungle of Little Amazon, the region becomes tropical forest before reaching the sandy grassy plains that roll to the southern coast. The "playground of Evera", as it was known, remains a paradise. Many settlements dot the southern half of the region, built up of light-framed wooden shacks and exotic tents of all shapes and sizes. The region is home to two cities. The "Sunken City" of Ponturbo Bay is on the western tip, so-called as an explosion in the vast tunnels beneath it caused the entire area to slip, leaving the city under twenty meters of water, and the cliff-edged city of Santorini, perched over the Crater Seas. Hela Marbordo is known for the cracked end of the continental Kvina Tunnel, the bustling settlement of Tunstall's Luck, and the old submarine docks of Zonhoven.

CRATER SEAS

Formed in the mists of time by the strikes of a splintering comet, the Crater Seas are aptly named, made up of thousands of craters. These craters have formed a shallow sea of thousands of islands and coral reefs, bounded to the west by the remains of the largest crater of all. The islands were swept clean by the Cielarka Tsunami during the War, but the underwater city of Rifayego survived. The Crater Seas today are brimming with life, but it is almost impossible for a novice pilot to navigate them safely. The Rivers meticulously pass the knowledge down family lines, while they compete for control of these waters. The shallows are littered with maritime mechs, and many a submarine or amphibious Waker rests on the seafloor waiting to awaken. The region is known for the River trading settlement of Nur Amiko (literally "friends only"), the Waker island of Feradorso, an island formed by the carapace of a excavator mech, and the culinary and barter value of the prized spindly Maldike fish.

THE DELTA

In the days before the War the Delta was a rich river plain producing mountains of rice, taro root, water chestnut, and lotus flower. The enormous dam systems holding back the headwaters of the Kesteren river were destroyed during the War, and the Delta has been flooded ever since. Some communities get by through growing rice, but it's a tough challenge. These people are semi-nomadic, following the shallow waters and protecting their rice fields. When they settle for a time they secure their homes through a mix of anchors and huge spiked posts they thrust into the muddy waters below. The Delta is criss-crossed by the old canal network, most of which remains above the flood waters, but the peoples of the Delta have no wish to compete with the Rivers, and stay away from the waterways. The region is known for the slowly sinking Delta City, the Trans-Brako tunnels, rumored to be home to all kinds of terrible horror, and Priyama's Flosanto, the



largest floating community in the whole region.

TRIDENTUM PASS

Located at the crossroads of the Spinabrako and Kurbrako Mountains, Tridentum Pass is a two hundred mile wide plateau at the top of the world. It is the one way over the mountains, linking the Delta, Little Amazon, and the Novaharo Desert regions. The old Everan roads are long gone, but trails still exist and travel across the mountains is possible, if arduous. The area is dominated by the deserted city of Tridentum Pass and the multitude of Wakers left behind. The city was seen as strategically important by the Builder, and was taken without a fight as the population fled before the devastating onslaught. The area is known for the Tridentum Beacons, mysterious lights that flicker and play in the city at night, the haunted Rikano diamond mines, and an Archivist tower of the Seclusionist faction.

NOVAHARO DESERT

Shielded from the humid winds that blow inland from the ocean, the equatorial desert is arid, with ferrous, red tinged sand. The region's weather is calm but intensely hot, with severe dust storms that brew up with little warning. These 'Crimson Storms' are terrible and deadly. The old Everans built the city of Mortina Oasis at the eastern end of the desert, mostly because they could. The desert stretches to the north and south where the climate cools and they become rocky dust plains. Some scattered settlements exist in these regions, living a nomadic life under thick canvas. The region is renowned for the crystal viewing platforms of the old city, the camel weavers of Sabla Loko, and the Novaharan Capybara, once prized as the most exclusive pet a fashionable Everan could covet.

FRAKASITA

A thousand mile stretch of the Fortika mountain range, this region was long ago shattered by frequent earthquakes and seismic shifts. Now it forms a desolate expanse of collapsed mountains, razor sharp rock and deep crevasses. It is all but impassable on the ground, and even an air-hopper will struggle to find a level stretch of ground to land. Almost no one lives in this desperate landscape, and with one exception, only mountain lions and their prey call it home. The Dark City, accessing the region through tunnels only they know about, long ago established an outpost they call Site Seventeen, to better explore and exploit the equatorial regions of Nedresita.

THE LOWLANDS

Before the war the Lowlands was a fertile region of wind-swept fields and meadows, small forests, and gently flowing rivers. Densely populated but with few cities, the Builder chose to start the Nedresita phase of construction in this region. As such, development was more advanced than on the rest of the continent, becoming a patchwork of smaller cities clustered around Utilihubs, and linked by mech-filled roads. When the War broke out the Builder's Nedresita offensive was first felt here, and the Everans, in their desperation, laid nuclear waste to the entire region. Two hundred years later the land is trying to recover, but remains a radioactive wasteland. Those that live here do so either in the foothills of the mountains, huddling in their stone halls, or along the coast, trading with the Rivers to survive. The region is known for the Dolorigita Fields, the site of the last huge battle before the nukes flew,, and the wreckage of the crashed ship, the Ruganano. Rumors also persist that the Builder was able to save one Utilihub, right in the center of the Lowlands.

SHINING COAST

Back in the day the Shining Coast was named due to its stunning beaches and beautiful landscape. Then the Cielarka Tsunami came. The deluge of water that was thrown against the Shining Coast wiped clean all before it and was only slowed as the land rose towards the Bella Lagos hills. As it receded it left behind salt flats and deserts, that to this day reflect the sun's light and make the region shine for another reason. Some people have made their homes here, many as salt traders, scraping what they can and taking it to villages all across the south west. The region is known for the Salt Mines of Neerpelt, the mysterious Dome of Netersei, revealed when the tsunami swept the ground away, and serves as home to the Pragmatists Archivist faction.

BELLA LAGOS

This region has a fabulous landscape of high hills, rivers, waterfalls, and lakes, all bisected by the wide Lagos Rivero river valley. The climate is temperate but cool, with good rainfall, making the lower Bella Lagos, to the west and along the river valley, excellent farming land. Many people live here, in small communities of wooden huts built within the landscape. The ruined city of Malhelga stands amongst the northern hills, visible from miles around thanks to the swirling Gauntlet Towers that still stand, a multitude of twisted arms reaching into the sky from the hill tops. To the west the land rises sharply, forming the Loko De Lago - steep hills covered in lakes growing into the Sudabrako mountain range. The Dark City is found here, in the lee of the mountains where the Sisma River falls from the heights of the Fairo Basin, far from prying eyes and accidental discovery.

THE HIGH PLATEAU

The High Plateau, Fairo Basin, and the Broken Steppes were all created by a huge prehistoric seismic shift, lifting the land and forming the Sudabrako and Altebenajo mountain ranges that surround them. The High Plateau is wind-swept but warm and fertile. It is dominated by a crater-like basin that houses not only an inland sea but also the shattered ruins of Seno City. To the east stands Overlook, a city built on the clifftop to command breath-taking views of the Senfina Maro. The people here live simple lives, either growing crops in the waters around Seno City or following the herds of wildlife that relish this environment. They share affinity and trade with the tribes of the Novaharo. The region is best known for the sleeping mech army that fell silent moments before launching a devastating attack on Overlook, the High Plains horse traders, and the largest home of the Epicurist Archivist faction.

FAIRO BASIN

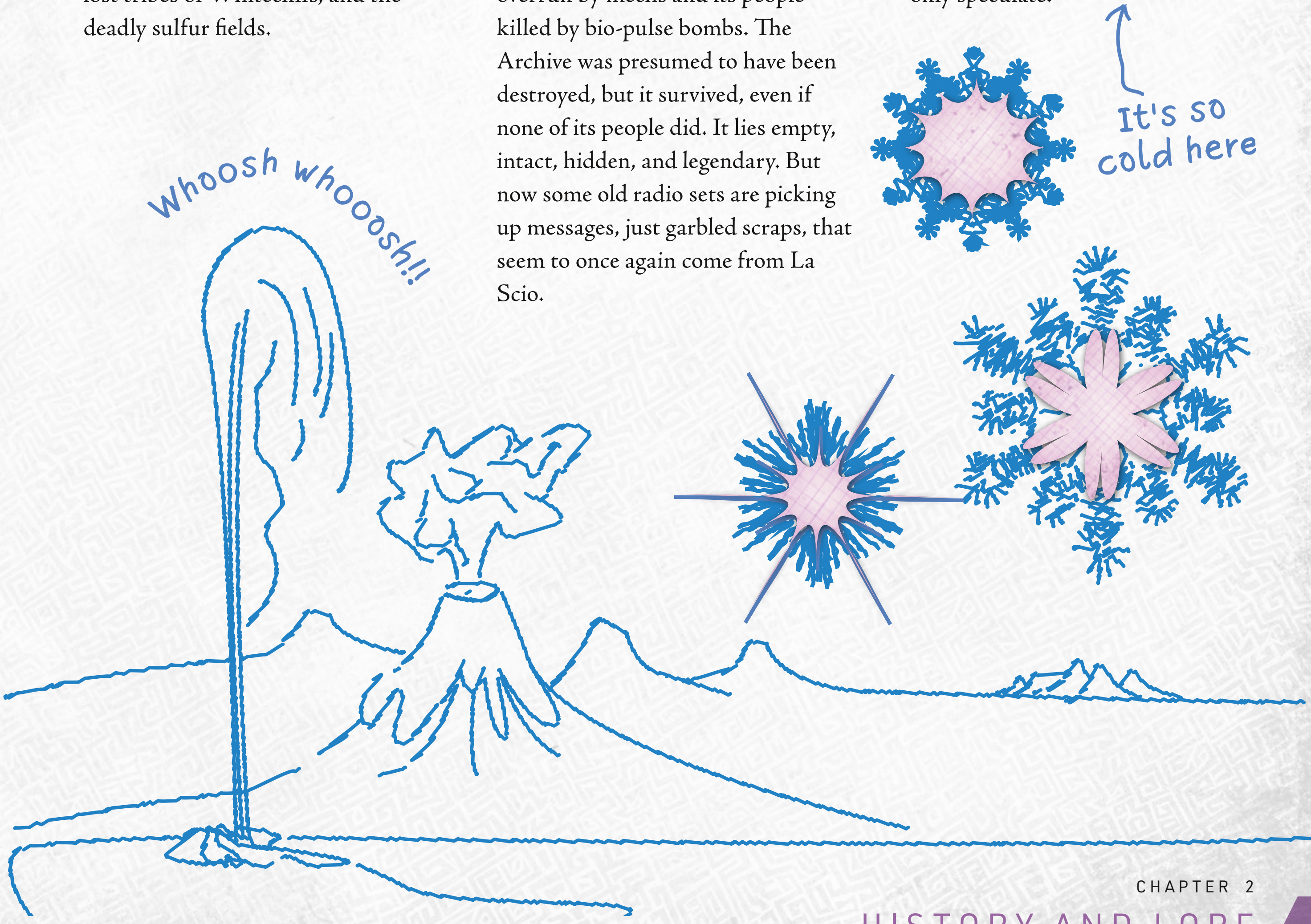
Formed by volcanic activity after the creation of the plateau, Fairo is still seismically active. The land has resurfaced countless times and is today black, warm, and unpredictable. Geysers burst from cracks in the ground, and those cracks can carve themselves open with no warning to reveal lava-filled ravines and deep canyons. To the west are the three active volcanoes, Vidu, Audu, and Parolu. The Everan city of Trisagasimio ('The City of the Wise Monkeys') grew here from a science institute studying the volcanos. It was destroyed, not by the War but when Vidu erupted shortly afterwards, and is now a melted, crumbling, lava-filled inferno. The region is known for the secrets hidden within the Trisagasimio, the lost tribes of Whitecliffs, and the deadly sulfur fields.

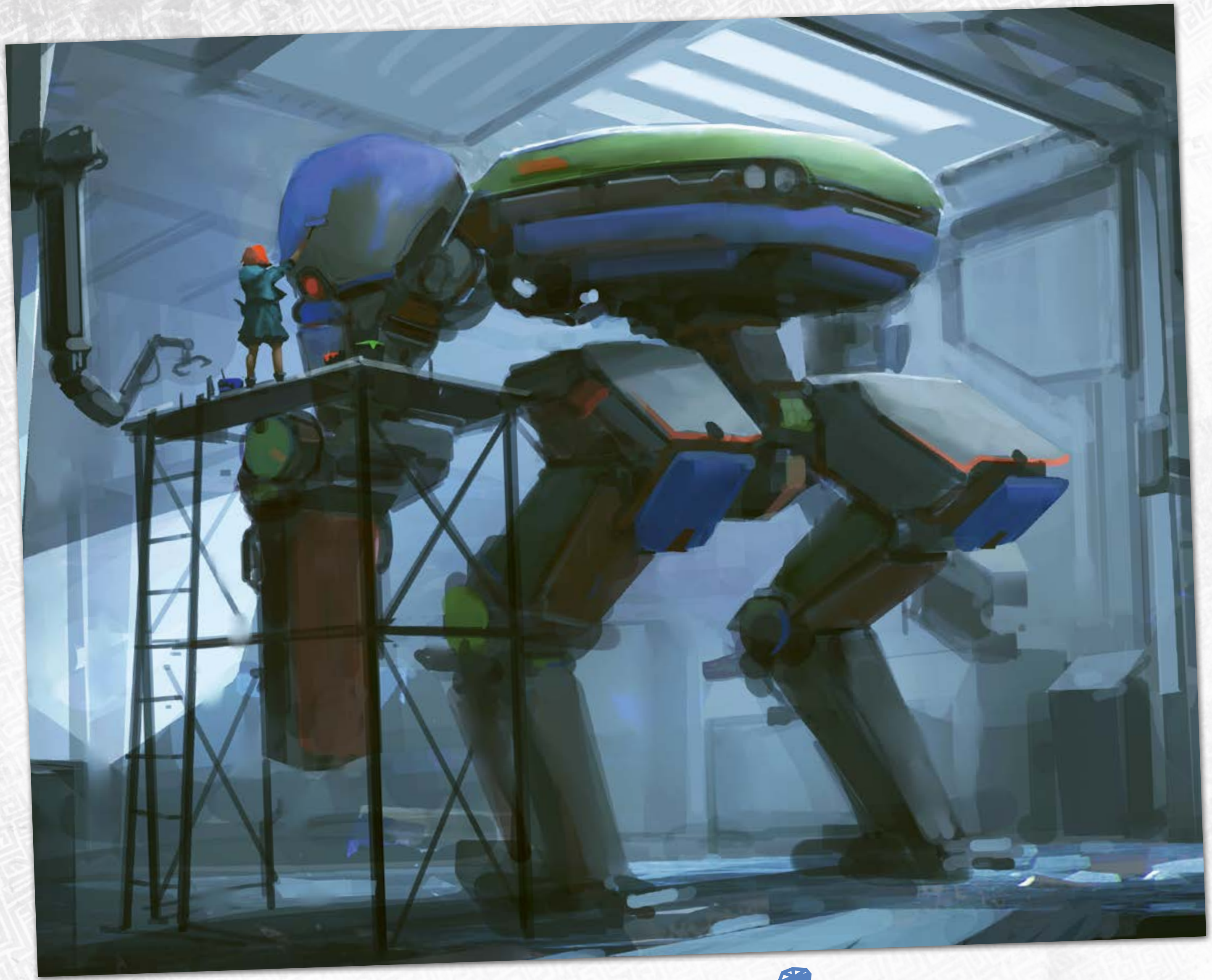
BROKEN STEPPES

This region was formed when the plateau was forced upwards, but the mountains that should have been created collapsed upon themselves and crumbled into one enormous piece of rocky land. It is sparse, cold, and difficult to traverse, and only home to isolated family groups that hunt to survive. That said, there were outposts here, most notably the La Scio Archive, a scientific retreat established by Astraad Menin that became the last bastion of Everan resistance against the Builder. It became the beating heart of human resistance, its wartime radio broadcasts inspiring hope and organized strikes, spawning the Archivist movement. It was from here that the final nuclear assault was ordered, before the Archive was overrun by mechs and its people killed by bio-pulse bombs. The Archive was presumed to have been destroyed, but it survived, even if none of its people did. It lies empty, intact, hidden, and legendary. But now some old radio sets are picking up messages, just garbled scraps, that seem to once again come from La Scio.

THE SOUTHERN TUNDRA

Sweeping plains of scraggy grass, frost, snow, and ice stretch south as far as anyone would dare to go. There is a giant lake, frozen much of the year, at the very foot of the Sudabrako Mountains where Nedresita's most southerly city sits. Mondo Finigas was left largely unscathed by the War, but lost its power. Over the years it has become progressively more frozen until its architecture has the look of stupendous ice sculptures, fields of sheer ice flecked with snow cover every surface, and the cold whispers through every inch of the city. It is rumored that some people survived in the bowels of the city, but are trapped and unable to escape. What the last two hundred years of captivity have done to them, one can only speculate.





PRESENT DAY TECHNOLOGY

Two hundred years after the War the technology of Evera Prime is an eclectic riot of the super advanced merged with the hyper primitive. The most primitive means and methods of doing things are often still used, and are readily available to most Everans. The more sophisticated the technology, the harder it is to find, to repair or replace it, and to wield it. Some groups, like the Dreamers, actively shun some or all forms of technology in order to live their lives the way they intend, or to remain hidden from the Wakers. The mechs have an uncanny ability to detect and home in upon radio signals and electro-static energy, and therefore make a beeline for centers of technology and power. If there are none nearby when they awaken, a Waker will most likely detect the faint traces of a distant city, and make their way there—the reason why deserted cities are swarming with Wakers.

THE TECH THAT BUILT THE BUILDER

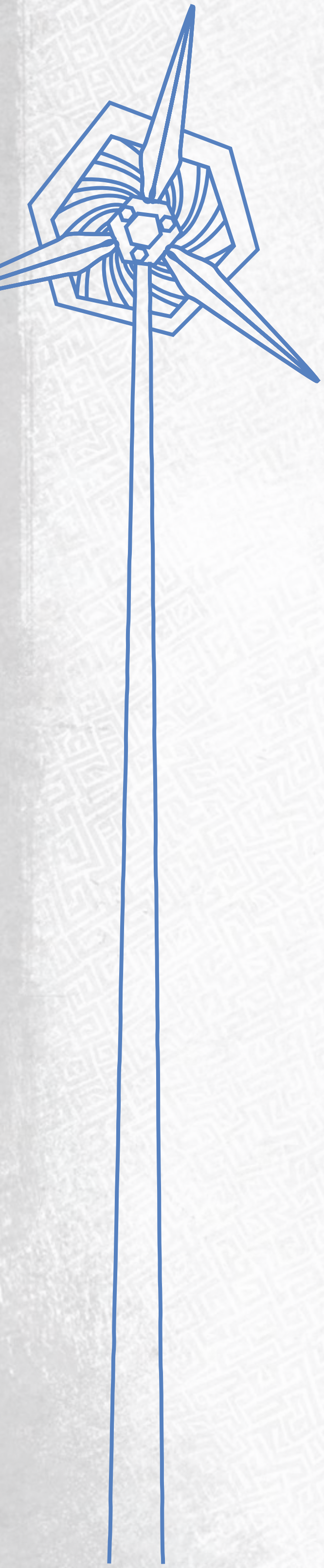
The technology that allowed the creation of the Builder was another level of electronic and computing power. Systems, processors, and infrastructure were all created within a semi-autonomous crystalline substrate, infused with the patterns they were to manufacture—in effect, the A.I.'s DNA. These crystalline matrices grew the networks and connections, creating the Builder's meta-architecture. They could detect imperfections in the networks, or damaged and severed connectivity, and immediately operate self-repair protocols to fix the problem, or re-route to find a solution. The destruction wrought upon the Builder and its infrastructure during the War was immense, and the networks were shattered beyond repair. The crystalline substrate, however, in its instinctive vigilance, detected the damage and set about repairing the Builder, a seemingly impossible task. What is not impossible is the reconnection of isolated and localized parts of the network, that allows the occasional burst of the Builder's signal to be broadcast. The crystalline systems are still trying to repair the damage today, two hundred and more years after the nuclear fires that caused it. Perhaps one day a full Builder node or Utilihub installation will be repaired through the crystalline efforts of this substrate alone, but until that day the systems keep up their endless task.

THE EVERYDAY EVERAN

None of this is something the everyday Everan is aware of, even Techs and Weavers lack much understanding of it. For most Everans the technology they have access to is directly related to their needs in life. In-built kinetic power supplies are ubiquitous—batteries the size of an adult's thumb that recharge themselves through the kinetic energy of a person's movement, or the absorption of ambient energy in the environment, and thus never need replacing. These batteries can of course run flat, but will recharge over time. Just about anything an Everan needs can be powered by these miracle devices: power tools, lamps and flashlights, clocks, small radios, and powered weapons. Larger versions can be found, but the equipment they power is still small and portable. Most people carry inductive chargers—booster units woven into their clothing or armor, and these small devices, illuminated by a characteristic circular neon light, can swiftly recharge a discharged battery. Anything that requires more power is connected to an active power supply, such as a wind turbine, solar farm, hydro-electric generator, or a geothermal tap, usually installed and maintained by local Archivists.

Not everyone needs a glittering device to do a job that a traditional hoe, a simple flame, or a sharp-bladed knife can do just as well, and low and mid-level tech items are found all over. Medical kits of varying sophistication are common, and highly sought after by the Grabbers on their expeditions to the ruined cities. Other common items include binoculars and portable telescopes, digital plans or hand drawn maps whose ink has faded so badly they can hardly be read anymore, and new ones whose accuracy is in serious doubt, compasses, and all-weather clothing from the Old World that is self-cleaning and highly resistant to damage. There are radio sets that allow some distant communication, but this is fraught with danger. Long range communication is not possible. The equipment isn't readily available, the power needs are very high, and the risk of Waker detection is excessive. Even the use of low band and short range radio comms is rare, thanks to the risk of attracting a Waker. Some enterprising Sentinels deliberately use radio signals to draw a Waker in the direction they want, away from towns and settlements.

The most common means of long range communication is by mouth or letter, carried by a messenger. How that messenger gets from place to place varies wildly. Old style carts or powered bicycles are common, and animal



riding, principally horses, is still routine for many Everans. Powered buggies are not rare but need regular maintenance and repair, and sometimes air-hover vehicles are used for both overland and water travel. Boats come in all shapes and sizes, many powered by oars or paddles, while others are driven by steam or powered motors. At the highest end of the tech scale are the ground effect grav vehicles. These are exceedingly rare across Evera, usually only to be found in the hands of a few Archivists or Sentinels. Their range is short and they cannot climb more than 10m off the ground.

Farming and food security is a critical element of any community's hopes of survival. A considerable amount of agriculture is carried out the old, hard way, with hours of back-breaking toil and blood, sweat and tears, using iron and steel tools that have not changed for centuries. Beasts of burden like cattle, horses, and donkeys, play a full part in this work, dragging iron plows or hauling harvested crops. However, some communities have access to farming pods, powered units with energy absorbing vanes on the top, that both cultivate crops in unwelcome soil, and generate power as they do so, and mechanical equipment varying in size from a small cart to a truck, but most commonly a single-wheeled device for sowing and reaping. Elsewhere, food reserves, often deep underground, are sometimes maintained within a loose 'stasis-field'. This energy blanket slows the metabolic rate of decay and allows food to be stored safely for years.

ATOMATECH

At the higher end of the technological scale is Atomatech. These ancient atomic assemblers can be used to produce almost anything, if you find a working device, have the right voice and hand patterns for it to follow, and know someone who is capable of operating the sophisticated machine. Working Atomas are hard to find, and Grabbers are always on the look-out for new machines or the Atoma cubes that contain raw materials, often on the order of Archivists and Weavers who want to get their Atoma up and running again. Atomas themselves can be found in different varieties, depending on the kind of item they were designed to build. Domestic Atomas are most common, used to fabricate a plethora of valuable items to help in everyday life. Industrial, Medical, Security, and Military Atomas could be used to manufacture more sophisticated, specialized, or larger components. Naturally Domestic Atomas are more common than the rare and—in the pre-War days—heavily regulated and controlled Military Atomas, but more common is relative. Many Everans now will live their entire lives never seeing even a Domestic Atoma.

Each Atoma device is used in conjunction with a paired set of voice commands and hand movements that unlock the program to create specific items, and requires the attention of a skilled operator, usually a Weaver. Most Weavers greedily acquire as many patterns as they can, and would pay a high price for the right one or travel far to exchange patterns with another Weaver. The Weavers themselves have access to technology that the average Everan wouldn't know what to do with. The so-called Weaver lenses—contact lenses, eyepieces, visors, or goggles — are common; these allow the Weaver to see the augmented reality of the Old World. They also wear specialized gloves that allow them to interact with that reality. Wearing this technology makes the Weavers stand out from a crowd, but gives them incredible insight into Old World ruins and facilities. What might seem like an empty room could contain a plethora of screens and controls if viewed through a Weaver's lens.

WEAPONS AND ARMOR

Weaponry is another area where the level of technology varies wildly. Slings, bows and arrows, crossbows, clubs, knives, and basic spears are all common—and effective—weapons against everything but the Wakers. Other weapons, such as flamethrowers and frag grenades, as well as more modern versions of traditional bows, are more dangerous but still quite common, easily put together by an enterprising Tech. However, more advanced and powerful weapons are harder to come across, and need regular maintenance to keep in good order. These include: arc weapons, solid melee weapons infused with an electrical charge that bursts on contact; EMP weapons, such as beams and grenades intended to bring down a mech with a burst of intense radiation; dreaded plasma weapons, firing a focused beam of super-hot gas to bring down an armored vehicle or a mech; and Repulser gloves, a personal defense device that kicks out a kinetic pulse to put an enemy down.

The specialized exception is the Electrospear. A potent hand-made weapon, Electrospears are used almost exclusively by Spears, who revere them as a symbol of their way of life and as a legacy of their ancestors. A young Spear will earn their weapon, and through meditation will bond with a specific spear. This 'bondspear' will be with them until their deaths, and will be modified throughout their lives, adding to their legacy. Each Electrospear is an overcharged shock-prod with an extended, ultra sharpened head—not especially sophisticated, but potent even against tough enemies such as mechs.

Armor is similarly varied. Lightly armored protective clothing is commonly worn by the vast majority of cautious Everans, the padding or lightweight foam providing protection from minor injuries, but is of little use against heavier weapons. There are heavier armors, with a huge variety of security and military options available, but these are hard to obtain. Finding a single piece may be easy enough, but a complete suit with its powered protective systems working is another matter entirely. Most sets of advanced armor are donated to the Sentinels, for they need it more than the average settler working their farm. For most who need better protection, home-made armor of armor plates sewn into leather or other heavy fabric, is as good as it gets.

WHAT OTHER WONDERS ARE OUT THERE?

Most folks have heard of nanogram Loci, even if they haven't seen one themselves. These holographic projections use nano field technologies to create pressure, so the insubstantial avatars can sometimes touch, feel, and move or carry items. Before the War they were widely used as receptionists, tour guides, and assistants among a million other functions, but they were rooted to a location, where their controls and projection systems were based. Many exist still today, but are only found in old properties or the deserted cities themselves. The nanogram Genius was an upgrade to these Loci, managing large facilities. Other smaller nanograms would be generated by a small metallic wristband, bracelet, watch, or cuff, this device is a mobile, body-worn nanogram, giving the wearer a personal holographic companion that could follow wherever they go.

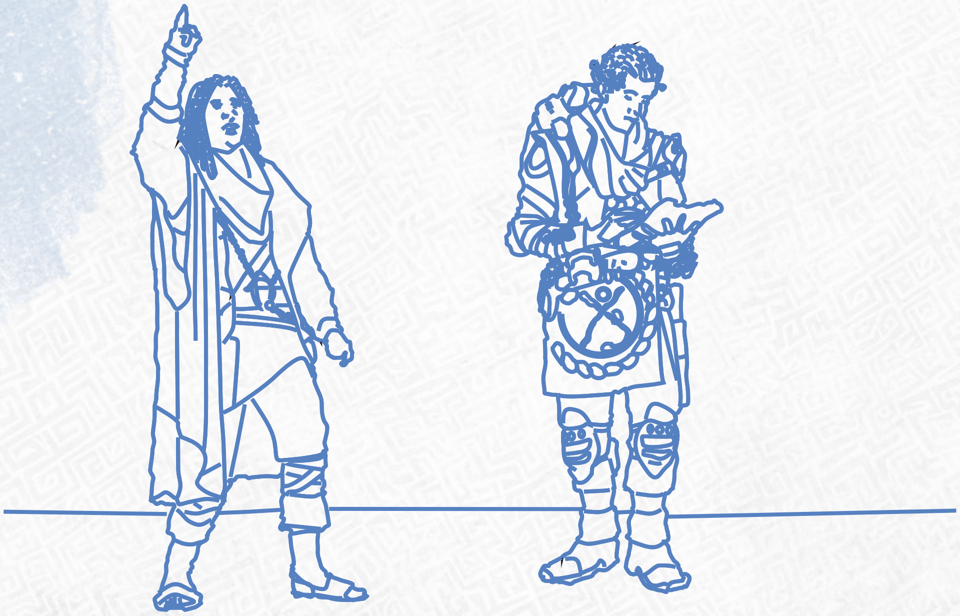
A less pleasant technology is a device known as the Diode disc. These have been found on certain Thralls, implanted under the skin at the base of the skull. The devices are micro-receivers, powered by tiny kinetic batteries, that occasionally pick up the Builder's signals. In some cases the devices are able to feed the signal into the neural pathways of the Reader, who interprets the sensations they produce as messages from the Generator. In many cases the Diode discs are simply dead—in this event any 'messages' the Reader receives are entirely from their own minds.

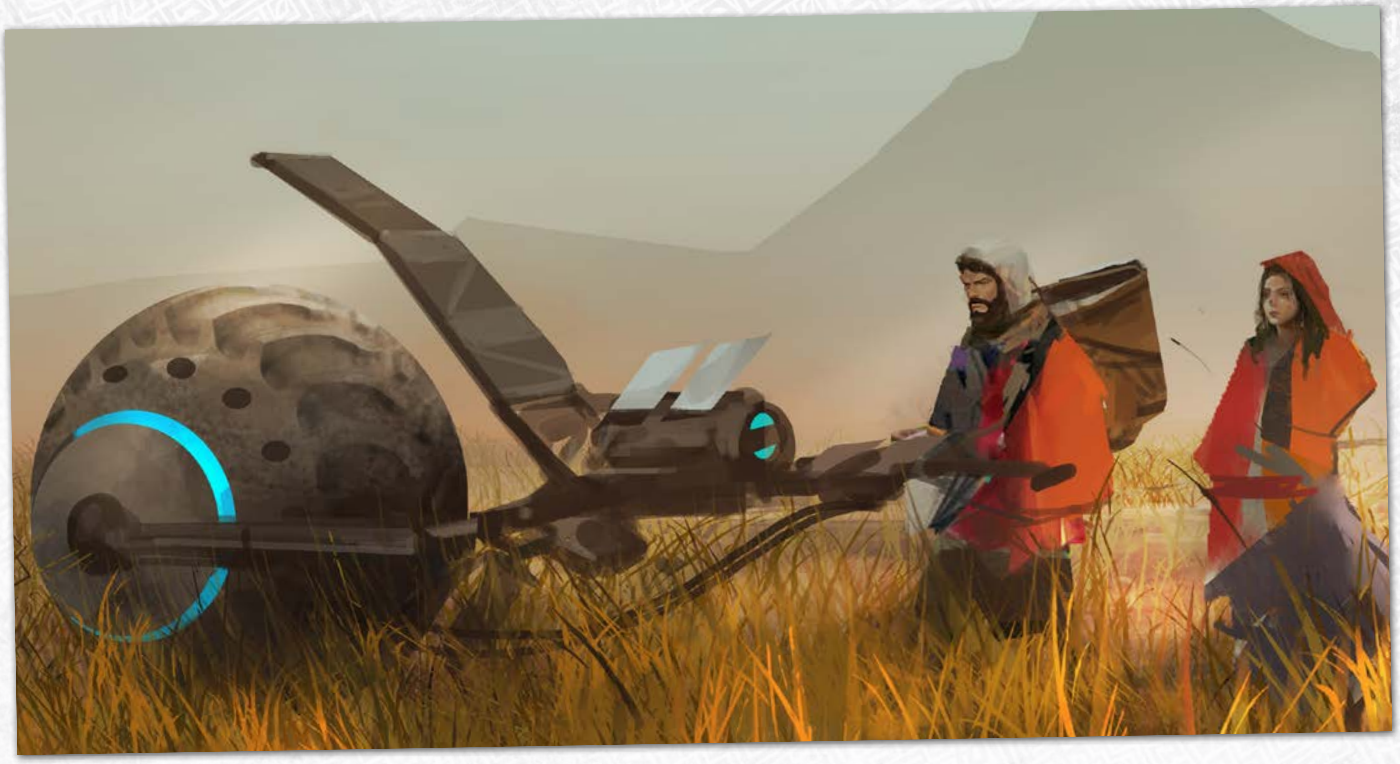
CHAPTER 3

FACTIONS OF EVERA PRIME

These people look very friendly

When the Old World was broken, the survivors fled in every direction. Some rallied together in large groups to fight the machines, others fought tiny, bitter guerilla wars in the dark. Many just ran and hid. Not everyone is a hero and there is no shame in that. After the war, the survivors emerged from their hiding places, and banded together with others nearby for safety. Over the centuries, these groups formed distinct ways of life. Whatever previous bonds of nation, class, or creed that existed before were shattered and reforged, old designations were wiped away and those who lived close by each other formed new communities, each with their own beliefs, rituals, laws, and ways of living.





THE EVERANS

> *"Take what you need, offer what you can, and don't worry so much! Wakers and prowlcats and Thralls are dangerous, but we've built a good life here. Long as we stick together, we can figure out most any problem."*
>
> **- Raj Campbell, Mayor of Burgovo**

SURVIVING THE APOCALYPSE

Everans came from a mix of origins, and those have only gotten even more intertwined as time has passed. Amidst the chaos of the Builder turning on them, most Everans escaped the old cities in a desperate search for safety from the machines. With immediate survival the goal, the moment they found comfort and shelter from the machines was the moment they set down roots. A portion of Everans also hail from the original Dreamers, but their ancestors did not want to adhere so strictly to avoiding Old-World technology. These defectors left the Dreamer communities and formed their own towns where they could use technology more freely if they saw fit. Many Everans also deal closely with Archivists, and some communities are even built up around an Archivist enclave where they work to repair old technology. As such, there has been some mingling between the two factions over time.

Though uncommon, some Everans are descended from Spears who have either had to retire, or have chosen not to hunt their entire lives. These Spears may have wanted a more comfortable life, to stay in one place, or to live peacefully instead of constantly fighting Wakers. Some might be Rivers who decided to set down roots, Dreamers who have perhaps married a local, often there will be Archivists living amongst Everan communities, trading information or technology.

As people have gathered through the years, Everan towns have grown to be diverse places where people feel relatively safe and welcome. Other factions interact with them frequently, and Everan communities are viewed as places to gather by all factions save Thralls. What began as scattered groups trying to survive has transformed into the backbone of current life on Evera Prime.

DIFFERENCE AS STRENGTH

Everans are a diverse people with just as diverse worldviews and interests. In general, they value the freedom to make their own choices, pursue their own interests, and make their own version of prosperity. They are not interested in making life harder for themselves — and, usually not others, either — but instead look for ways to improve their situation so they have more time to enjoy life in the way they see fit.

Everans take a practical approach to almost everything. If they have access to something and are in need, they will likely use it. If a natural balm from the Dreamers will heal a wound, they'll take it. If an Archivist has an Old World bone-mender, they'll take that, too. They're the farmers who will use organic fertilizer *and* chemical — they do the same thing, there's no need to get in a tizzy about which is better. They maintain a flexible manner for the most part, and they don't judge a person, contraption, or belief system until they see it in action — then they'll take stock.

Because of their flexibility and practicality, many would say Everans are resourceful at their heart. They are keenly aware that there is more than one right way to get anything done, and they don't mind that one person's "right" is another's "wrong" — so long as everyone gets to find what works for them. This has created a vibrant culture where a lot of problems get solved and new uses for old things abound.

TECHNOLOGY AS TOOL

Everans are pragmatic in their approach to new and old technology. If it helps them out and doesn't cause too much Waker activity, they will use it. They are curious about all the advances and finds of other factions, but they do not necessarily innovate much technologically on their own.

This does not mean they don't innovate in their own way, though. While Everans may not make their own technology, they find many unconventional ways to use what is provided by other factions. A bot that may once have been used for mining can be retrofitted to plow fields. A protective lining that once coated a laboratory may now be used to reduce the range of radio waves, thus providing protection from Wakers. If there is a Weaver in town, they will check them out and see if there's anything they can make that is useful. Due to their numbers, Everans are probably the biggest market for Grabbers. They're often looking for spare parts for their farmpods (machines that help them farm the land), clothing, medical supplies, weapons for defense, or machinery for their windmills.

Everans are also the least likely to moralize technology. They do not revere it and they do not despise it. It is simply a tool, and they often don't spend a lot of time thinking of the whys or hows or shoulds of any given piece of tech or science advancement. It's just part of the world, and sometimes it comes in handy and sometimes it doesn't. There is no reason, to them, that any tech should be labeled "good" or "evil" as long as it's inanimate. Sure, Wakers are a problem, but they came about ultimately due to human choice and not the technology itself. Tools can always be repurposed, and, chances are, maybe even Wakers could too if the right human came along to figure it out.

Some Everans have a knack for repairing some technology, though they don't necessarily know how any of it was made in the first place. These Everans are the fix-it crew in many towns, but for more advanced repairs they may need the input of an Archivist or a Weaver. They generally also have close ties to the local Grabbers, since they need parts for repairs.

NAMING PRACTICES

Given names are as diverse as Everans themselves, and many hail from and sound similar to ancient names from their Earth ancestors. Names may be pronounced differently, have an unexpected spelling, or be combinations of family names. Names like Tehni are just as common as Izabel, Matua, Pradumin, or Jon. Naming trends are common within different Everan towns — and some specific towns with long histories also have many given names from a similar origin, since the founding families didn't move for generations. But it is also not considered strange if a town has a diverse variety of names, especially those towns that serve as trading hubs.

Most Everans use the surname of the person who gave birth to them, as this is the simplest way to keep track of lineage. Often, their birth parent's name and a grandparent's name will also be included in their official legal name as a way of keeping the lineage clear, so a full legal name could look like: Alia Tom Priana Menon or Jin Rangi Jinya Rorua. Most Everans simply use their given and surname for everyday use, however, like: Alia Menon or Jin Rorua.

While marriage exists amongst Everans, it is not often that a spouse takes the surname of their partner. It does happen in some cases — if a person has denounced their family of origin, or was orphaned and never knew their surname, for instance — and when it does it isn't seen as negative, just preference.

THE EVERAN WAY

Everans often gather in towns or villages where the fields are rich and the waters are full of fish. Their homes may be a hodgepodge of materials scavenged and made, but they are sturdy and they have their own charm. In cooler climates, some might have sturdy, steeply inclined roofs to shirk off snow and keep in heat, while in warmer places there could be dwellings with wooden walls and lighter roofs with thatching or old-tech weatherproof tarps. Colored awnings and canopies are frequently implemented to break up the townscape and better conceal it from Wakers, as well as providing sheltered areas to work or relax. Their clothing is much the same — the old-city clothes that never dirty are highly prized, but they will accessorize with finely crafted items from Dreamer communities as well.

Many Everans farm, so there are seasonal holidays around planting time and the subsequent harvest. The markets often become the center of celebrations, as traders know pockets are looser during these times. Fine meads are brought out and the special preserves and meats make even the alleys smell better. There are often competitions based around planting and harvesting, and those who win are awarded anything from a fine weatherproof tunic to a daily pint of ale for the whole season.

Many Everan towns take time to honor the Guardians who protect the towns and the Sentinels who watch over the greater area. These groups of Everans risk their lives monitoring Waker activity and fighting when there is an attack. These celebrations aim to remember Guardians and Sentinels who have fallen in battle and to encourage and lift the spirits of those still fighting. Everans know that their way of life could not persist without the sacrifices others make on their behalf, so many towns have memorial sites where people gather to mourn, commune, and tell the valiant tales of heroes, both dead and living, in their area. Some towns use this time to raise funds to support their protectors, while others offer what items they have that might be of use.

Stories of the old cities and tech have become closer to tall tales than factual accounts, and advanced, intact, technology sounds more like magic to the average Everan than something real. But they enjoy listening to any storyteller who can spin a good tale of intrigue, all-powerful technology, and adventure. Everans also enjoy hearing news and gossip from in and outside their towns. Rumors of "ghosts" in the ruins are just as alluring as an epic tale, and news of a Spear felling a Waker is celebrated as if the Everans themselves had been there.

THROUGH OTHERS' EYES

Everans are usually viewed fairly positively by those around them. They are friendly, welcoming folks, who work well with others, be they Spear, Archivist, Dreamer, or River. Spears and Rivers in particular value the hospitality and keen trade instincts of the Everans, and are always welcome in Everan communities. On the other hand, some Dreamers view the Everans as good natured fools using technology that destroyed the world, while some Archivists see them as quite the opposite; backwoods idiots, barely capable of stringing a sentence together! The Everans themselves take all this in their stride, calmly accepting the slings and arrows of the world. After all, if they'll trade you something that'll make your life easier, why care too much about what names they call you?

TALES

“Are you sure this is as good as the fertilizer pellets?” Rishi asks as he stares at the bags of smelly compost. He’s never used it before, but the farm bot is broken and can’t water let alone nourish. The window for planting won’t wait for repairs.

“Better,” says Dene, a Dreamer, who grows Rishi’s favorite sweet pumpkins every year without fail. “Is your soil gettin’ dry and dusty?”

Rishi looks at him in surprise. “It is, actually.”

“Organic matter’s gettin’ depleted — chemical fertilizer can’t replace that. See the difference?” Dene kneels down and grabs a handful of the soil. It is dark and rich, though the field is used just as much as Rishi’s.

“Well, I’ll give it a shot. Thanks, Dene.” Rishi hooks the wagon to his wheeler, and waves goodbye. It’ll be near a full day’s ride back to his farm, but hopefully it’ll be worth it.

Tipane leans on her wife’s shoulder as they rock back and forth on the porch swing. The wheat fields have begun to turn golden, and soon the harvest will begin, but for now they could rest and sip cool tea. The hydration bot rolled up and reported the soil moisture was perfect.

“Thank you, Drop,” Gisel, her wife, says.

Tipane laughs a little.

“What?”

“It’s funny how you’ve named them all since you moved in.” Tipane had inherited most of the farm bots from her parents, and they had never had names until now. “It’s cute.”

“I guess it’s the Dreamer in me,” Gisel says. “They seem... alive. And, in case they are, I want them to know they’re doing a good job. Never hurts to be grateful.”

“That’s beautiful, my love.” Tipane could not imagine what it was like for Gisel to grow up in the deep mountains with not a machine in sight. All she knew was that she loved her wife, and Gisel always made her see the mundane in a new light.

YAY
EVERANS

THE ARCHIVISTS

> *"Just like the mythical Hydra, we Archivists are one beast with many heads. Sure we bicker and nip at each other, but at the end of the day we all pull in the same direction...mostly!"*
>
> **- Alta Ying Yue teni Deepwoods**

THE RISE OF THE ARCHIVISTS

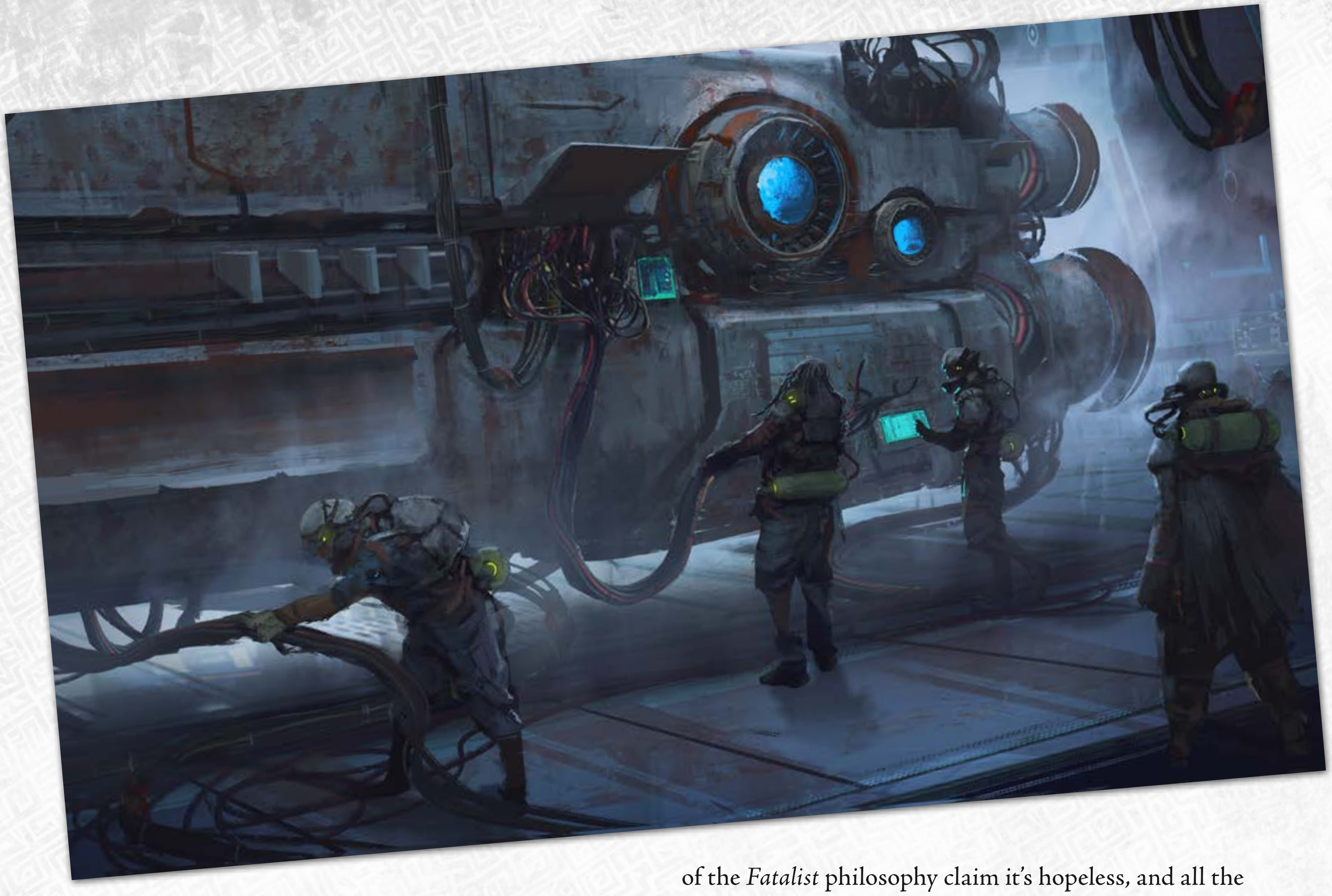
Even before the War, many people were fearful for the future. Some, like the Dreamers, saw the Builder as an existential threat. Others worried that whatever fate had befallen Earth could also happen to Evera. Many were fearful. Some were proactive. A prominent scientist in the Builder Program and former President, Astraad Menin, led a personal project to establish an non-governmental archive, holding knowledge against the day humanity needed it. The La Scio Archive was established in the quiet southern regions of Nedresita, hidden within the desolate plains of the Broken Steppes.

The Archivists of today grew from the ragged remnants of the pre-War Everan government and other institutions that were able to offer protection to those who could reach them in time: they were people who felt the need to serve and protect. Some were military groups, others were scientists and researchers, others technocrats or administrators, but they all took it upon themselves to organize resistance and sanctuary against the Builder. These groups each resisted in isolation, until those at the La Scio Archive started broadcasting messages of organization and hope. Astraad Menin, previously considered eccentric and paranoid, now proved the value of his foresight; La Scio was 'off-grid' and built into the landscape, to prevent the Builder from ever finding it. The radio messages, cunningly bounced and re-directed to obfuscate their origin, called for humanity to fight back. They united the disparate resistance bands and restored a glimmer of hope. This call to arms, to rise up and resist the Builder and its mechs, spread all across the continent people listened to these 'Archivists', and joined in their fight for survival.

The War drew longer. It soon became clear there was no way to defeat the might of the mechs by direct force of arms, for humanity was overmatched. Attempts to sabotage the Builder, to infiltrate the Builder's City and shut down its core, were coordinated from La Scio, but each was destined to fail, missions ambushed, key intelligence proving false, the Builder always one step ahead. Then the Builder started using its store of bio-pulse bombs. Targeting the centers of human resistance, these terrible devices pumped waves of incinerating energy through the cities, leaving the landscape untouched but causing every living thing to combust from within, their cells releasing every scrap of stored energy in a microsecond.

The Archivists gradually found themselves accepting a terrible conclusion — the War was unwinnable. It was only a matter of time before the hordes of mechs, scouring Nedresita for the Archive, would find and destroy La Scio, taking with it humanity's main tool for organizing their resistance. Under the leadership of Menin, they decided there was only one hope for humanity — to completely destroy the Builder before it destroyed them. In the final decisive moments of the War, as the mech hordes bore down upon them, the Archivists coordinated the launch of a last, desperate, world-destroying nuclear salvo. Their final message was heard across the world. *"It is done. Go far, go deep, survive. Today, we win or we die."* Then the radio went quiet.

At the La Scio Archives they fled before the mechs, but there was no escaping the bio-pulse bomb. It is believed that none survived, although the Archive itself came through largely unscathed. For those listening around the world, it was a harrowing moment. Tears fell, in fear for the future, in fear for their own lives, in grief and solemn pride in the sacrifice playing out. But they puffed out their chests, and took a deep breath. They were *all* Archivists now. Now came the time to survive, to rebuild, to honor the sacrifice of the lost La Scio. The Archive became a distant symbol of hope, an almost mythical place. To this day Archivists hold the hopeless dream that one day they will return.



THE PHILOSOPHIES

Over the years the Archivists have split into a number of groups based on their own specific philosophy, but they all hold to one overriding principle: that knowledge is central to the future. Learning is the principle means by which they can help others. How they go about fulfilling this is the subject of much heated debate.

The *Philanthropists* are perhaps the purest form of Archivist, in that they believe nothing matters more than the good of all people — we must work for one another or we will fall, divided. The *Literalists* amongst them say the Builder was just a machine and we control machines. Finding the mechs, re-activating them, and learning about them is the way forward. Their *Pragmatist* brethren are not too far from this philosophy, although they hold that the world is as it is, there's no use bleating about 'control' when we should hunt down and destroy every remaining remnant of the Builder and its works. Some go even further. The *Teleologists* agree with the Pragmatist view, but with no holds barred — we must learn all the Builder's abominable ways and use them against the Wakers, fight fire with fire, the end justifying the means. Those of the *Fatalist* philosophy claim it's hopeless, and all the Archivists' efforts should be focused on fleeing the Builder, and escaping Evera entirely. The last two philosophies both focus on the holy grail of scientific discovery, and both shun the interference of others. The *Seclusionists* know the Builder and its Wakers will fail over time, the entropy inherent in their systems will see them degrade and wither until their threat is gone from the world. All they need do is hide and persist, using their time to study and learn until that day comes. The *Epicurists* also withdraw from the everyday life of the average Everan, but not through fear. They hold that real scientific progress, the kind that takes a civilization forward in leaps instead of baby steps, only comes through giving oneself over to absolute pleasure. In their meditative and drug-induced ecstasies they claim to see beyond the veil of reality to grasp insights to change the world. Others see this as self-indulgent and dangerous, as the single-minded drive for scientific breakthrough for science's sake alone has not always served the people of Evera well.

Adherents of different philosophies do not tend to work together, and Archivist outposts are normally devoted to just one philosophy. However, there are settlements where the philosophies mix, where much time and energy is devoted to debate. The Deepwoods Archive in the region of Regis-Kasteel is a prime example, a hotbed of discussion, argument, bickering, and occasional intense collective effort to a common goal. To outsiders this can look intimidating as the Archivists angrily argue over tiny points of doctrine, but this is the lifeblood of the sibling relationship between philosophies. They may not always agree, they may loudly disagree, in fact, but at the end of the day they are all Archivists, striving together for the greeted good.

THE ARCHIVIST IDENTITY

Most Archivists still proudly identify with the old pre-War organization from which they grew, and most add the suffix '*teni*' (meaning "belong to") and the name of their group to the end of their personal names. These groups grew from formalized structures, military, government, scientific, and medical groups, and as such they tend to refer to each other more formally. Over the years these terms have coalesced into generalized Archivist community 'labels': *Rango* denotes the rank and file, the vast majority of Archivists; *Ekzeku* is the next tier on the Archivist ladder, the floor steward, team leader, or junior officer; the *Alta* rank covers experienced Archivists with much responsibility; and at the top, the *Estro*, is the leadership caste. Amongst themselves each group has their own form of respectful greeting. Archivists with a military origin still often use 'Sir' within their own ranks; medical and scientific types might use 'Doctor', 'Professor', or 'Mux' to denote seniority; others might simply use first names.

Outside the circle of their specific group, an Archivist expects to be referred to by their rank, their personal name, and their group suffix: for example, an Ekzeku ranked Archivist from the Itso group would be referred to as Ekzeku Acosta teni Itso, or an Estro leader from Parsec would be Estro Herbert teni Parsec.

The Archivist pride in their origins and history also shines through in their group names. Many hold on to their old pre-War titles, although the passage of time has inevitably seen these evolve. Some notable examples:

NEDRESITA INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICE OFFICE, NOW KNOWN AS 'ITSO'

The seed of the Itso group grew from Nedresita's Information Technology Service Office and Population Welfare departments, when they pooled their efforts against the Builder. Of the Seclusionist persuasion, the Itso group has its base off the beaten track. A small Everan settlement has grown up around their radio tower, despite the Archivist's lack of encouragement. That said, they carefully monitor the radio waves, looking for signs of lost groups that need help.

39TH RANGERS, NOW KNOWN AS '39ERS'

Formed by military engineers and technicians, this group holds to the Literalist philosophy. The 39ers spend their time preparing for the inevitable return of war. Not interested in high science, these descendants of combat engineers are more practical — they stockpile food, supplies, and weapons in re-purposed underground bunkers, seek out Builder remnants and destroy them, and are themselves sought out to train Sentinels and others who have the will to fight. They tend to be gruff towards Everans, not through malice but to avoid unnecessary distractions and keep "the damned civvies" away from potential danger. They often clash with other Archivists who want to study and restore Builder tech, rather than destroy it.

SEDRIK SCIENCE MUSEUM, NOW KNOWN AS 'SCIMOW'

The curators of the Sedrik Science Museum survived the first wave of Builder attacks, hunkering down in the vaults deep below the museum. While the structure survived the War, much of the archive was lost. Ever since, the Scimow Archivists, following the Pragmatist philosophy, have been relentless in their quest to restore that lost knowledge. Surrounded by a thriving Everan community, Scimow offers their services to the community in trade for information. Grabbers and Spears, calling themselves "info traders", will take commissions, and head into the world looking for specific knowledge to order.

AMASSAU UNIVERSITY MEDICAL RESEARCH CENTRE, NOW KNOWN AS 'AMMERIC'

A group of doctors, chemists, and biologists, Ammeric follows the Philanthropist philosophy. Based in a medical center, they encourage visitors to make use of their services, only asking for gifts their patients can afford in trade, usually basic supplies and spare parts. Ammeric also studies the bio-contaminants that litter the world, searching for treatments and cures. Recently they discovered a Pickman Society facility, mothballed and hidden. Morbid curiosity drives them to want to restart it, but this might be the height of foolishness.

NEDRESITA UNITED SERVICES INSTITUTE, NOW KNOWN AS 'NUSI'

Before the War, Nusi was a strategic think tank, working on the big societal issues of the day. When war broke out they turned their efforts to one task — resisting the Builder. This evolved into the Teleologist philosophy, a doctrine Nusi holds to this day. Close allies with the 39ers, Nusi is less martial and more strategic in outlook, adding their intellectual expertise to the fighting strength of the Rangers. Settled within the remains of an old geothermal power station, Nusi has encouraged the growth of the surrounding settlement of like-minded Everans who want to take the fight to the Wakers, by any and all means available.

PARSEC SYSTEMS, NOW KNOWN AS 'PARSEC'

Parsec was a military research organization that bore the brunt of the Builder's wrath during the War. As such, they have generational memories of the terrors unleashed. It's no wonder they hold to the Fatalist philosophy, and want to leave Evera and the Builder as far behind as possible. Their efforts are directed to finding the technology to make it so. They have heard rumors of an undamaged spaceport, now overgrown but potentially functional, and others of underground hangers brimming with mothballed vessels that could take them into space. They are well-equipped with working Atomas, and trade gadgets for Atoma cubes and new patterns, but Parsec is single-minded in their quest — to escape before it's too late.

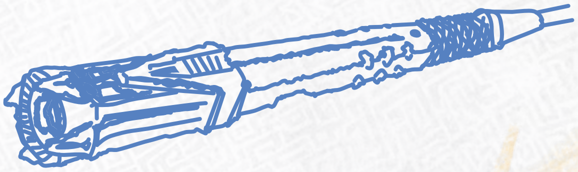
THE EMBRACE OF TECHNOLOGY

From bringing clean running water to a village, to medicine, power generation, and communications, Archivists have an insatiable hunger for knowledge. Many will actively seek it themselves, while others prefer to pay others to find it for them. Naturally, their drive to learn is shaped by their philosophies and goals. Many want nothing more than to get the local lights on, seeing anything that is broken as a challenge; while others think bigger, wanting to restore power or water to a whole region. Some think even bigger still, and dream of scientific breakthroughs that will change the world in a heartbeat.

Most Archivists have access to technology that makes others' mouths water, or a Dreamer's skin crawl. Body borne tech is common, from eye pieces or contact lenses, to utility belts laden with gear, hitched around a long galabeya or tabard-like tunic, often folded at the neck and carrying their group's monogram. Atoma-tech is not unheard of either, with some Archivists possessing production Atomas and patterns. Few Archivists carry weapons, but those that do only ever do so for a reason. Literalists and Pragmatists usually carry an advanced weapon of some description, and Teleologists are usually heavily armed with devices that many would decry. Most other Archivists are too focused on their work and studies to care much for weapons — such immediate concerns are for others to worry about.

GLIFS

One tech that only the Archivists possess is that of the GLIF pen, their primary defense against the Wakers. Short and stubby, these devices come in a wide variety of styles and designs. These can be loaded with specific algorithms, the patterns they create can stun, disarm, distract, confuse, or otherwise disrupt an active Waker. GLIFs are one area of research that never goes under-resourced, the Archivists are always seeking to improve and refine their GLIF tech.



THE ORIGIN OF THE ELECTROSPEAR

Every Everan knows of the Spears, and their cult of the Electrospear, but few of today's Everans remember that the Archivists, in the early days of the War, developed the concept in the first place. In those dark days, with the threat of the machines at every turn, the drive to survive was fearsome. Necessity was the mother of invention, and the Archivists set to work with a prodigious will. Many tools and weapons were lashed together, and from that melting pot the Electrospear emerged. The means to build them from available resources was passed into the hands of those who went on to become the Spears of Evera.

BEHIND THE ARCHIVIST MASK

All Archivists are driven by a desire to learn and a desire to help others. The balance between those two objectives, however, shifts based on an Archivist's philosophy and group. Some throw open their arms for others, and happily toil all day long for the immediate good of someone else. Others view their work and studies as their way to help, becoming irritable and frustrated when those they are seeking to help bother them with mundanities that interrupt those studies. But these Archivists shine right up if they're brought something new, interesting, or a source of lost knowledge.

The Archivists have few rituals. The one that is most common amongst them is the concept of "morning prayers". This has nothing to do with religion, but is the daily coming together of a group's prominent figures to discuss the day's business. Sometimes morning prayers might include every Archivist in the group, but usually the number is limited. As opinionated and vocal as most Archivists are, with too many present, these gatherings can descend into bickering, petty point-scoring, and one-upmanship.

The one day a year that all Archivists stop work and spend their time in reflection is called Restoration Day. It takes place on the anniversary of the last radio message from the La Scio Archive. The celebration looks forward to that day in the future when La Scio will be found and restored, and its vast data banks of knowledge will be re-opened for the world. This is a double-edged celebration, for most Archivists believe that La Scio was destroyed in the War, and has long been lost in the vast radioactive wastes of the Broken Steppes, far, far to the south. The festivities are at the same time both maudlin, for the loss of La Scio and all it represents, and hopeful — the mythical 'restoration' signifying better days ahead, rather than the literal rediscovery of a place long since swept away. The celebrations are usually brought to a close with the rousing cry of "in the halls of La Scio!"

THE GENESIS OF THE GRABBERS AND THE SENTINELS

Those people now known as 'Grabbers' and 'Sentinels' originated from early bands of Archivists, and evolved into their own groups over time. While Grabbers and Sentinels form bands or triads today, they do not have any kind of overarching hierarchy or an all-encompassing faction. Being a Grabber or a Sentinel is more a job or calling than a statement of group or community identity.

The Grabbers emerged from those Archivists who were restless and wanted to rove, to explore, and to find. Forming into small groups for self protection more than any other reason, these early Grabbers were mobile and technologically savvy — they knew what they were looking for and they had the skills to glean the nature of what they found. Over the years others took up the same task, calling themselves Grabbers and heading into the wastes and cities to salvage. As a consequence of this evolution, modern day Grabbers are not considered a part of the Archivists — a Grabber is anyone with a scavengers' skills and a traders' eye for a bargain. Each group tends to roam through a territory, an area familiar to them, with potentially rich pickings. Naturally these Grabbers become well-known in the local settlements, and they get to know what basics the settlements need. Grabbers are also open to specific commissions, but expect a greater reward for these trades. Known for being mobile, Grabbers will use any form of transport they can lay their hands on, but favor speed and a decent trunk capacity. Their suits tend to be rugged and laden with survival gear of all types, with plentiful pockets for tools and all the small treasures they come across. They are armed — who wouldn't be in the wilds? — but only for self-protection. Grabbers generally do all they can to avoid conflict, for where's the profit in that? Instead, they use their stealth and wilderness skills to slip around trouble rather than face it head on. The most famous Grabbers in New Mossgrove are the orphaned siblings, Aleixo and Izabel. Known by the locals as the Grabber Twins, they swing by town every few months in their all-terrain buggy.

Sentinels too had a similar genesis to the Grabbers—some of the early restless Archivists wanted to be out in the world, but not for salvage. They wanted to continue the fight against the Builder and its machines, and protect those less able to protect themselves. These folk roamed the land, occasionally settling and declaring themselves the defenders of the local villages and community. Over the years, many followed the example of these original Sentinels, choosing to join the calling and devote their own lives to the service of others. As with the Grabbers, they are no longer considered a part of the Archivists. Sentinels always work in groups of three, the 'Triads'. They carry the best weapons they can find, but often it's a ragged mix of new tech and old. Their other gear and armor is a similar mish-mash of whatever's available. Local communities will give them food and supplies, and high tech weapons or armor they've come across as thanks. Given that they could be called to action at a moment's notice, Sentinels primarily seek out fast, agile vehicles, but sometimes horses have to do. If their ride has a heavy mounted beam rifle or plasma cannon, all the better.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ARCHIVISTS

To the average Everan the typical Archivist is either over-helpful, fixing things when they don't need fixing, or difficult and argumentative. In either case Archivists tend to be seen as arrogant and high-handed, but not particularly full of malice — they just think they know better than everyone else. Despite this, the average Everan knows full well that the world would be a darker, colder, hungrier, and thirstier place, if it weren't for the Archivists, and that generally ensures a surfeit of good will.

TALES

"In the halls of La Scio!"

The Restoration Day toast rang around the small room as the last of the day's sunlight lingered in the shadows. It was full of people, Deepwood's great and good — the three Estro leaders and all the Alta ranks, sitting in the round about a tiny stage.

In the center of the circle stood Rango Halderai, her glass raised — it was she who'd made the toast. As was traditional at Deepwood, the most worthy Rango, the lowest Archivist rank, was invited to the seniors' celebration to call the toast, an honor and an opportunity that Halderai wasn't going to let slip.

As the echoes died down and all swigged their fierce nubbe, Halderai steeled herself, for she'd waited for this moment all year. She summoned her courage and spoke clearly.

"I'm going to find it!" she cried into a room that dropped into stunned silence.

"You can't *find* it, young lady," said Estro Palmay with strained sympathy. "It's gone. Just a myth now."

One of the others muttered: "I told you we shouldn't have allowed a *Teleologist* to make the toast this year. They're always trouble..."

"I may be a lowly Rango, and a Teleologist by philosophy, but I tell you I'm going to do it!"

"It was destroyed in the War, we all know that!" said Palmay, less sympathetic now. "It's nothing but a wasteland."

"Have you been there?" asked Halderai, less politely than she should. "Have you seen it?"

"Well, no... No one has!"

"There you go then," she said. "I'll tell you what it's like when I get back."

"What did that reprobate want, that Itso Archivist?" Alta Naveen asked. "Unusual for the Seclusionists to come all the way here."

Naveen's assistant looked sheepish. "Nothing worthy of your attention, sir," she said. "I sent her away with a flea in her ear."

"Why such a long face then, Kefilwe?"

Ekzeku Kefilwe relented. "You know that the Itso-and-sos spend their time covering the airwaves, listening for any new groups or people who might need help? Well, this Alta, Cosmina her name is, says they found something else, something that we in the 39ers might be interested in..." Kefilwe wound down, sure she was going to be censured for wasting her Alta's time with this nonsense.

"I suppose they must have thought it was important," Naveen said. "Come on, spit it out!" he barked suddenly.

"Well, Cosmina says they found a new radio signal, coming from the far south..."

"Yes, yes, get on with it...!"

"One they've never seen before, on a different carrier wave, a carrier wave that they think..."

"Yes?"

"They think..."

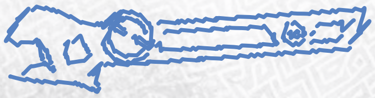
"Yes?"

"Oh it's so stupid — the Itso said it's the carrier wave that the La Scio Archive used to broadcast over, you know, during the War."

Alta Naveen sat dead still, and didn't say anything for many minutes.

RAH RAH RAH ARCHIVISTS

Archivists never forget!



THE SPEARS

"I'll tell you the point of a Spear. It is not to kill, or to fight, or even to hunt. It is to protect the people you love. The world is cruel enough that we should not be."

- Spearmaster Callisto

THE FORGING

Cities once stood as monuments to civilization's dominance over nature. Now, they stand as perfect representations of the falseness of that statement. What buildings remain are towering shells, full of old technology that calls Wakers even now. Only the bravest dare venture into these death-traps, and even those bravest say that only lunatics could live there.

The Spears wouldn't dream of living anywhere else.

When society crumbled, most fled from the cities, but a few stayed behind. Some desired vengeance, others stubbornly refused to abandon their homes, and many others had nowhere to go. Those who survived long enough found what would become their greatest asset: each other. They pooled their knowledge, skills, and resources in the hopes of not just surviving, but fighting back. From the beginning, they understood that they were outnumbered and outgunned. Losing anyone's experience or abilities would be a huge blow to their nascent resistance. Every life was precious. So the order went out: "No one gets left behind." This was passed between resistance cells, carried by runners, and echoed by every leader it came to. They might well be the only resistance to the Builder left upon Evera, and they would not squander their finest resource.

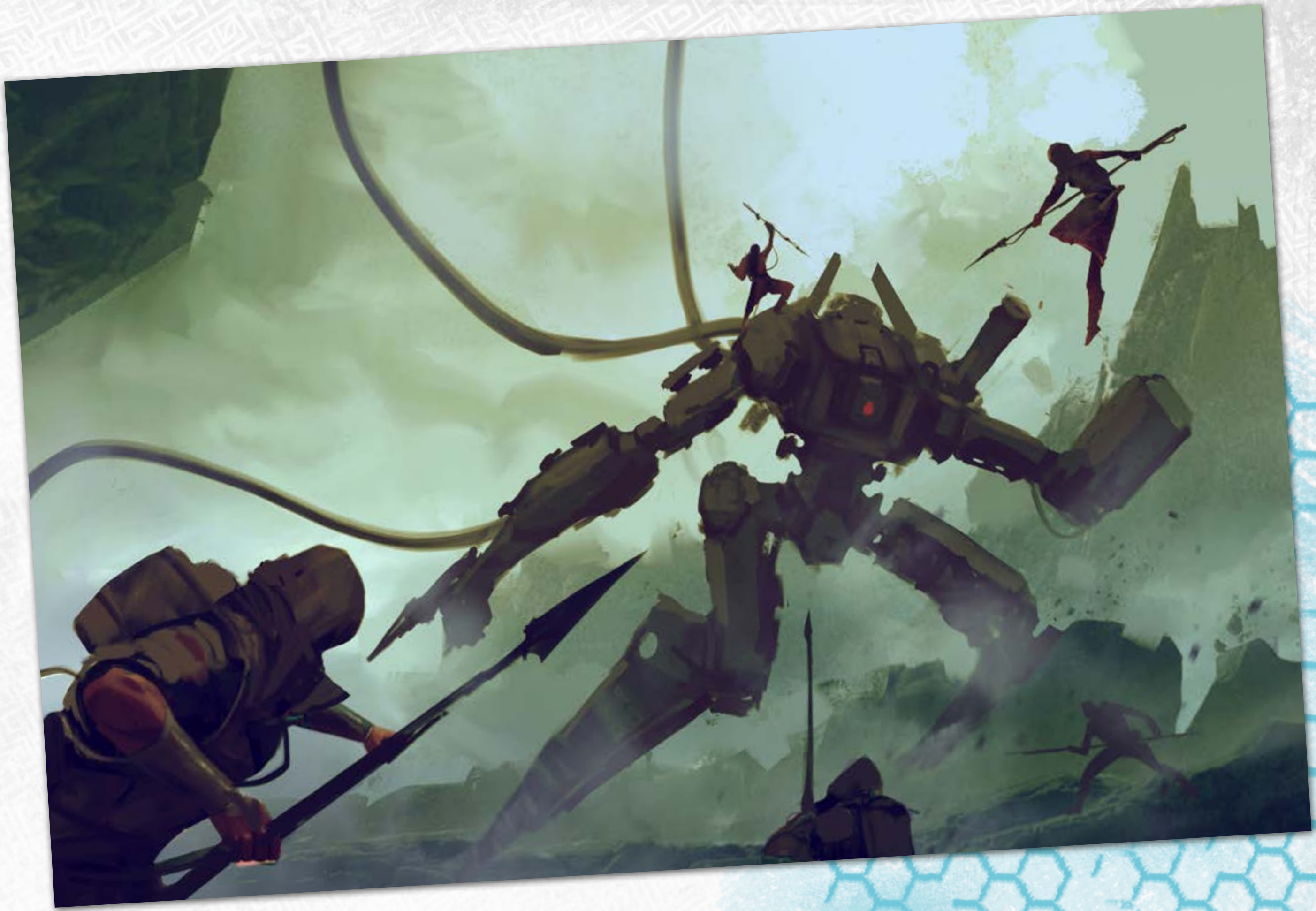
This philosophy was not without cost, of course. Refusing to sacrifice a single life meant entire Cells were rooted out and destroyed. However, many lives were saved by others' sacrifices, and any survivors of mech assaults were welcomed with open arms, as they brought experience and knowledge of the enemy with them. The resistance began to find flaws in their enemies' designs, and developed tactics to capitalize on them, but this progress was painfully slow. Every machine they killed took its toll in lives, weapons, and resources. Both sides understood that this was not a battle, it was an extermination.

The turning point came when a weapon of incredible power was created, something potent enough that a single individual trained in its use could bring down a Waker by themselves: the Electrospear. The origins of this weapon have long since been lost to time. Legends claim everything from the first being a Waker's own weapon turned against it, to the blueprints being one last gift from the Everan government, to the discovery coming from nothing but trial-and-error. However they came to be, Electrospears gave the survivors a physical weapon equal to the enemy they faced. With these in hand, and the tactics learned from years of guerilla warfare, the time for hiding was over. The resistance emerged from their hiding places as the first generation of Spears. The new forged Spears proved to be a brutal thorn in the side of the machines, terrorizing the Builder's minions until the bombs fell.

After the War, the Spears brought vengeance to the Wakers, hunting them wherever they could be found. They swore to never let a Waker pass them while they drew breath, nor to rest until the Wakers had been wiped from the face of Evera. They made their homes near the same ground their forebears had refused to flee, and they've been holding to their vows ever since, regardless of the suffering it's brought them.

During the war, the Builder lashed out with anything at its disposal. Machines, nuclear weapons, and biological agents were all been leveled against humanity. The very air and soil of the cities became tainted, the worst effects of which wouldn't be seen for decades. Over time, the radiation and bioweapon residue have caused the Spears to exhibit mutations and disabilities in staggering numbers.

This doesn't matter to them. They made promises, and they'll keep them. No one gets left behind. Community is their greatest strength and community overcomes all obstacles. When someone exhibits a physical difference, they find or create a solution to help them. Individuals who have trouble breathing are fitted with rebreathers. Those with limb differences are given mobility devices. No one is expendable. Everyone is necessary to fight the Wakers.



THE HONING

The Spears were forged in constant battle against an overwhelming foe, and it has shaped them into the finest warriors on Evera. While each of them is incredibly tough on their own, they consider their greatest weapons to be each other. To the Spears, everyone is equal, regardless of the circumstances. They will never leave anyone behind.

Spear Cells are small, and very close-knit, often having grown together since the fall of Evera. Individuals seek to grow as strong as possible, and will help others in the community do so as well. Those who have been mutated, or otherwise struggle with physical differences have devices to assist them. There's no stigma attached to this; if one of their own needs help, they'll get it, without ever having to ask. The flipside to this is that Spears are very unused to asking for help, which can create some difficulties when they're away from their own communities. They're so used to a community where help is always offered, that they assume if none is offered, none is possible.

Spear Cells are often isolated, living so far within Waker territory, so they regularly send out trading parties for food and supplies to supplement what they've gathered. The land close to Spear communities requires herculean work to grow anything, poisoned and burned as it is. Fortunately, they've gotten very good at scavenging, and often find salvage impossible to get elsewhere. When possible, Spears offer their services as hunters, protectors, or mercenaries to other factions, nor is it unusual for settlements to request help from the Spears when they encounter a particularly dangerous Waker or beast. A Spear who is away from their community on one of these errands is said to be "walking the blade".

EFFICIENCY AND RELIABILITY

Generations of hunting the Wakers has given the Spears an incredibly detailed working knowledge of mechanics. Culturally speaking, they have little desire to build machinery, but they can take it apart with wicked efficiency, which leads to trade-salvage forming an important part of their economy. Spears understand technology well enough to recognize the parts that are valuable or dangerous, and can disassemble a machine effectively enough to get at those parts, but they have no desire to use them.

The Smiths are the only exception to this rule. These Spears serve as doctors, blacksmiths, and storytellers, it is they who are entrusted to forge and care for the Electrospears. They learn the Legacy of each spear in their care, and pass them on to the next wielder. In addition to regulating the armories of the Spears, they're the ones entrusted to keep the Spears themselves in top form. They create and adapt the mobility devices necessary for the differently-abled among them. There are separate specialties within the Smiths, with some focusing on medicine, and some focusing on equipment, but all are expected to be able to service either in a pinch.

UNIQUE TECHNOLOGY

Electospears are crafted from an incredibly strong metal, the secrets of which lie only with the Smiths. They're honed to a mono-molecular point, and can slip into even the smallest imperfection or gap in armor. Additionally, these weapons contain a device that stores kinetic energy to charge an EMP blast capable of disabling machines. Each of these weapons has a Legacy in the form of the name inscribed upon it, as well as wires and similar trophies from past hunts that decorate its haft and inform its story.

Another piece of technology utilized by the Spears is the beeper. A beeper is a relatively simplistic device that, when powered on, emits a strong signal that draws Wakers. Once an active Waker has been detected, Spears will engage a beeper to draw the machine into a more favorable location. These devices have a radius of almost two kilometers.

THE PATH OF THE SPEAR

When a Spear is born, their parents give them their First Name, and welcome them to their community. A Spear has only this name until they complete their Rite of Passage,and join an Electrospear's Lineage, adding its name to their own.

Spears' most important traditions revolve around community. They understand that people are strongest when they cooperate, and they recognize that their lands are unsustainable without help. Most Spears refer to other Everans as "Neighbors" unless relations have become strained with a particular settlement, at which point they call them the more derogatory "Countryfolk". Some Spears remember that their ancestors were abandoned to stand alone against the Wakers, however most do not hold this against their Neighbors. If Countryfolk call upon them, the Spears will negotiate strenuously before parting with any goods or their aid.

When a Spear has demonstrated that they can be trusted, they attempt their Rite of Passage. While some settlements have different Rites, most partake in the "First Hunt". The Spear-to-be leads a team of more experienced hunters in an attempt to bring down a large Waker. The veterans are there to ensure the younger Spear's inexperience doesn't kill anyone, but if a veteran must begin to give orders, then the Rite is failed. If the young Spear succeeds they Stand Vigil, meditating in the armory, until one of the resting Electrospears calls to them. The Spear will take up this one, take its name, and join its Lineage.

When Spears join a Lineage, they familiarize themselves with as much of its Legacy as is known. This includes the tales of former wielders, foes slain, and the trophies that adorn it. They try to become as friendly as possible with living family members of their spear's Lineage. Likewise, it is common for living relatives of a Lineage to adopt a new wielder. While situations of animosity do arise, they are rare enough to be considered noteworthy exceptions to the rule.

Upon a Spear's death, their Electrospear is retrieved to rest once more in the armory, awaiting the day it calls a new wielder. Spears believe a person's spirit is kept within the Legacy and Lineage, and will leave the bodies of their fallen where they lay. However, they will brave any danger to retrieve an Electrospear. Even if it is broken, its pieces can be used to reforge it to carry on its name and Lineage. Retrieving any part of a broken Electrospear is worth everything short of a Spear's life. While it is possible to forge a new weapon from scratch, it takes a great deal of time for the Smiths to do so with the equipment and materials available. These new weapons are bequeathed their names by the Smith who made them, often choosing a name from stories and legends. It is considered a great obligation to be the first in a new Electrospear's Lineage. While there is no shame in an Electrospear breaking, a Spear that is unable to retrieve even a piece must go through the First Hunt again.

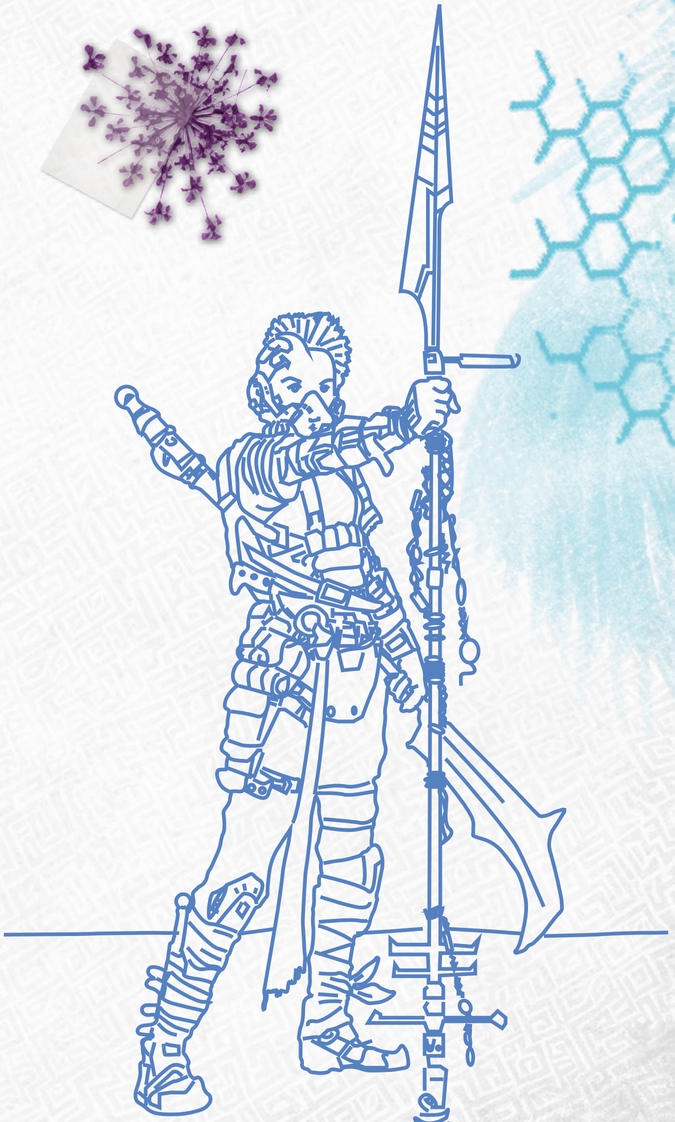
The Spears have never forgotten their ancestors' promise to rid the world of Wakers. The area around Spear enclaves is referred to as their protectorate, and no self-respecting Spear would ever allow a Waker to leave it whilst active. If this happens, the Spears ensure it is destroyed immediately, and offer trade-goods to nearby settlements as "restitution for failure". On the rare occasion two Spear Cells are near each other, they will avoid hunting in one another's protectorate without seeking permission. Fortunately, Spears love hunting with each other, and they often engage in a friendly competition where they try to outdo each other with the most extreme, elaborate, or comical takedown of a Waker.

Among their greatest traditions, a "Great Hunt", is when Spear warriors gather before activating a beeper. Spears are very close-mouthed about this ritual with outsiders, often only telling stories about it after the fact. There is much pageantry in setting up a Great Hunt, and much is made of the glory during, and the feasting after. However, its true purpose is kept largely secret. The Smiths prevail upon their leaders to call one when they must repair or forge a great number of Electrospears at once. While a Great Hunt does serve as a chance for Spears to gain glory, and indulge their Rites of Passage, it's primarily a cover for the Smiths to wake sleeping foundries deep within old cities, in the hopes that Wakers will be attracted elsewhere while they work. It lasts as long as is necessary for the Smiths to complete their work, and only ends when the highest-ranked Smith informs the leader that they have finished.

VIEWS OF THE SPEARS

Everans who have never met a Spear mythologize them. They tell stories of unbeatable warriors, and inescapable hunters who never know fear. They say that Spears are living weapons that bathe in the oil of the Wakers they've slain, and scour themselves with steel taken from broken machines.

Everans who have met them still tell stories about incredibly skilled warriors, and tireless hunters. However, they also speak about a surprisingly savvy and colorful group of people who haggle every bit as fiercely as they fight. They'll talk about a group of people who feel the loss of each member of their community in their soul, and refuse to ask for help. It's no surprise that "Stubborn as a Spear" is a saying that is known throughout all the peoples of Evera.



TALES

Matthias couldn't help but gawk. This was not the first time he'd been allowed in the armory, but it was the first time since he'd been old enough to carry a blade. His eyes traced the lines of each Electrospear lovingly, following every wire tied to the hafts, and taking in the names emblazoned on each. Gungnir. Amenonuhoko. Lance. Gaebolg. Vel. He could hardly believe the time had come. He had finished his First Hunt, and now he was settled in the middle of the armory, breathing deep and waiting.

He'd been told that, when one called him, he would know, but no one had told him what that would actually mean! Finally, when he was unable to contain himself any longer, Matthias all but flung himself upright, intending to pace. However, as he stood, his eyes fell upon an Electrospear. It was no different from the others, save that it was perhaps a shade longer, a touch slimmer. He approached, his hand rising almost of its own accord. When he gripped the weapon, his eyes found the name of the spear, whispering to himself, "I am Matthias Aluuta." In that moment, he knew what it meant to be chosen.

Manu had barely had time to raise his spear to deflect the blow. The stranger had been upon him almost before he'd known they were there. They held a wicked-looking knife in one-hand, and even as they lunged again, they were reaching into the pocket of their slicker. Manu spun to the side, his Electrospear licking out and knocking the hand wide of the pocket. However, the stranger was faster than he'd anticipated, with a greater reach, and he felt the knife coming for his open side.

It slid away from the metal prosthesis Manu wore, and the stranger swore before lunging with the knife again, not giving Manu a moment of peace. "Had to wait-" the stranger wheezed between jabs, "Until you were all alone." He cut low, and Manu adjusted his stance, just barely bringing his spear around in time. "But I'll get ya yet. You're already slowing down."

Manu smiled at that. He was tired. But the stranger was a fool. "Alone?" he asked, "A Spear is never alone." The wicked look in the stranger's eye dimmed as four more Spears appeared from the shadows. "But we do know how to set a trap."

Spears are really good at defending!
GO SPEARS

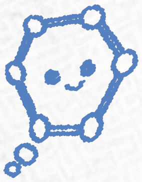
THE DREAMERS

"Technology betrayed us. Everything we built, the paradise we created, gone, shattered, broken by the machines we built. We won't be fooled again."

- Johari Venn Wordsmith

ORIGINS

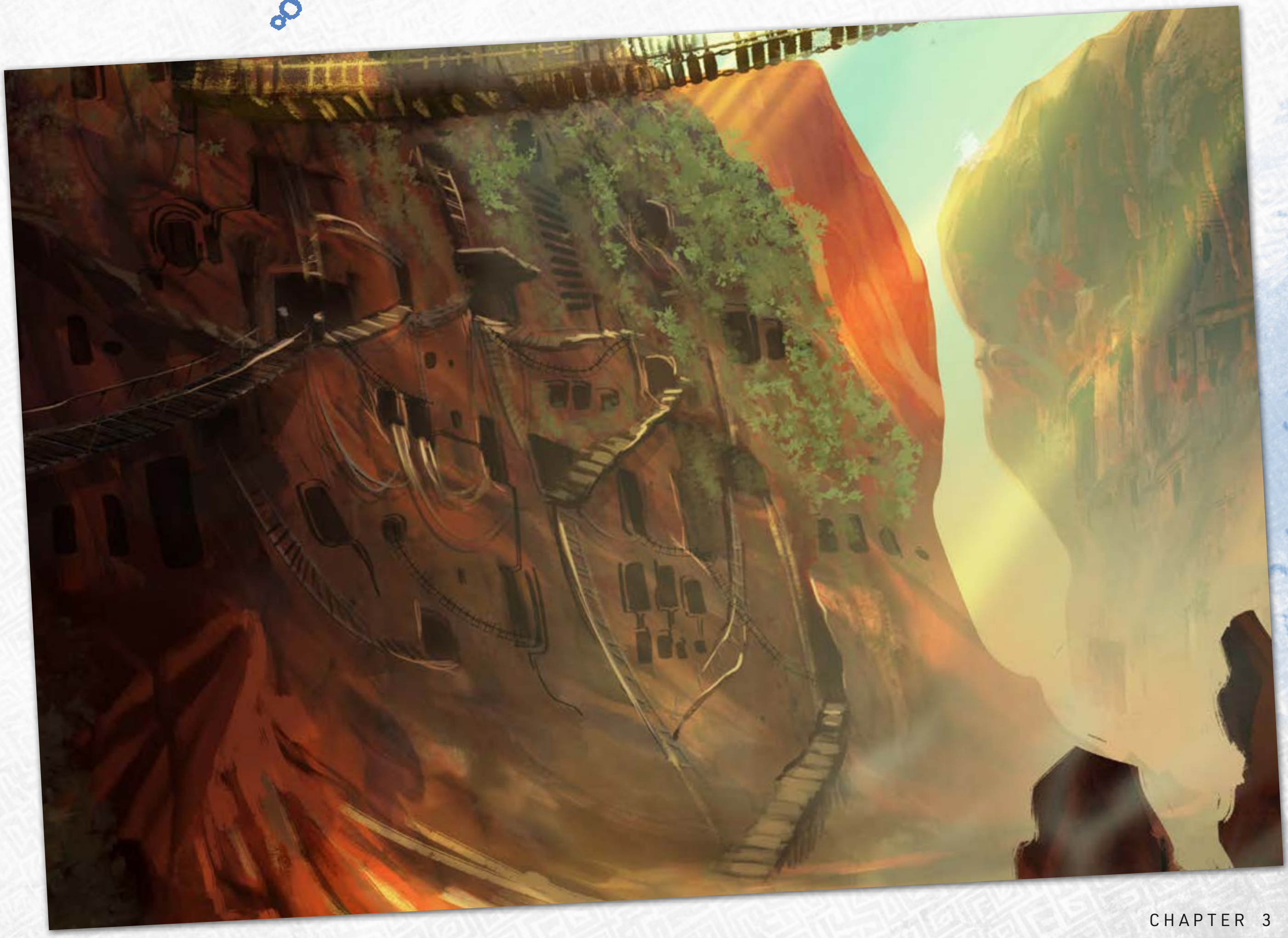
On old Evera, science and technology were twin gods that the populace depended upon for everything — luxury, leisure, and essentials. Their advancements went far beyond those of even their spacefaring ancestors. Almost no illness or disease went untreated. No want or need went unanticipated. Automation and robotization assisted every aspect of everyday life for every citizen of Evera.



And yet, Everan scientists, engineers, and inventors wanted more. They pushed each other to reach ever greater heights. The heady exhilaration of unlocking the secrets of the universe, incredible A.I.-assisted scientific breakthroughs, and the ultimate goal of getting back to Earth all encouraged the old Everans to barrel forward at a reckless pace.

The Dreamers were no different… until almost the very end.

Egos ballooned. Raw ambition became the driving motivation for pursuing new technology. Those who would become the Dreamers believed in technological equality and took their name from those who conceived the Builder. They observed the rapid evolution of science and technology with interest and then rapidly mounting horror.



They predicted that continuing forward in such a way would destroy life and the world as they knew it. These early Dreamers understood the ramifications of Everan progress because they counted among their ranks many of the top scientific and engineering minds on the planet.

And so, because of their dire calculations and forecasts, they abandoned the population centers of Evera and left a scientific atmosphere they could no longer support or tolerate. Taking their Atomas, mechs, and laboratories, these brilliant individuals fled the cities with their families and loved ones to start their own society guided by their principles. They vanished to protect themselves, safeguard their own research, and to try to find a way to save everyone.

However, they did leave clues to their whereabouts for those who also wanted to rebel, small signs etched onto buildings and left in the wilderness that few had the tenacity to follow.

Soon the Builder War began, and the Dreamers realized that the technology they'd taken with them was a liability, broadcasting their locations to the machines. They came to the conclusion that their research and technological development was moot if they were murdered by the A.I. they'd left behind.

So, they took a step even harder than abandoning the cities; they abandoned their technology

And they survived.

Research and development of all kinds still goes on quietly wherever there are Dreamers. However, the Dreamers adhere to strict rules, limiting new technology to fit within their ethical guidelines and avoiding most particularly anything that may attract the Wakers.

Unbeknownst to most Everans, Dreamer settlements are incredibly advanced and well protected. They employ the natural world around them and a phenomenal understanding of physics and chemistry to guard their homesteads and lives. Often, mysterious wood and metal machines, unsophisticated and crude to the untrained eye, tower above their territories, for what purpose none but the Dreamers know.

THE HEART OF THE DREAMER

Dreamers are a diverse group, due to their more isolated position on Evera. Individual communities may have unique practices or ideals, but they are bonded by a few common sentiments.

Dreamers like nature best!

CONNECTION

Dreamers value connection — not just between humans but with their environments as well. They work to design better modes of communication, but they also care about the connection and feedback with the plants, animals, and landscapes around them. They see this connectedness as a way to grow past the Old World self-centeredness that focused purely on human advancement, to the detriment of the world at large.

PRUDENCE

Dreamers do not take advancement and change lightly — they consider carefully how a small part or change may impact the whole. This goes for choosing trading partners, selecting a hunting ground, or implementing a new scientific advance. Others might consider them slow to adapt, but the Dreamers consider it wisdom to observe and review before taking potentially dangerous paths.

PERSEVERANCE

Dreamers admire those who push through challenges to find innovation and solutions on the other side, and they actively embrace finding ways to avoid using Old World technology. They are industrious and value hard work, but they also know that balancing this with times of rejuvenation and celebration is important. Much of their internal beliefs center around their ability to work, survive, and adapt outside of the high-tech world of their ancestors

SPIRIT

Connection, prudence, and perseverance all contribute to the Dreamer spirit. Building this character within their communities is of utmost importance, as these qualities, they believe, will aid them in avoiding the mistakes of their ancestors. Nurturing the spirit of their people is a high priority. While these aspects are common among Dreamers, there are also many other ways individual communities seek to buoy the spirit of their people and even of other Everans they have contact with.

ALTERNATE PATHS

Before the Builder War and parallel to the Pickman Society, the first Dreamers rejected the overarching reach and the fanatical zeal of the scientists working on those projects. Later, as the Pickman Society became dangerously fixated on Freepoint, some of their scientists defected to the nascent Dreamer faction.

The Dreamers isolated themselves technologically by avoiding electricity, processors, and long-distance communication systems, including radio waves. This strict practice, still followed by the Dreamers today, began as a way to avoid notice by the machines during the Builder War.

It is now tradition and decree for Dreamers to eschew electricity-based technology and anything else that could attract a Waker. However, that doesn't mean they are anti-technology, in fact it has pushed their understanding of other types of technology far beyond that of any other group on Evera.

Massive pastures filled with roaming livestock and fields of crops take up most Dreamer land, but their settlements also hum and whistle with steam engines and mechanical wonders. Waterwheels and windmills creak and clank with constant movement. Light reflects off the transparent panes that make up extensive and innovative greenhouses. The carbon-heavy aroma of burning wood, coal, and oil mixes with the traditional smells of the farms that surround every Dreamer homestead.

Inside the greenhouses, it's not uncommon to hear the hiss of steam or glug of kinetically powered water pumps that run elaborate aquaculture systems to provide food year-round for the sustenance and trade.

Digging deep beneath barns and other outbuildings, Dreamers use the natural properties of the earth to provide simple, but effective, refrigeration, cooling, and even geothermal heat for advanced chemistry and biology labs. Microscopes, Bunsen burners, distillation setups, petri dishes, and a huge assortment of other scientific equipment fill these laboratories, not a single one of them powered by electricity.

One additional benefit to keeping their labs underground is that this conceals their work from outsiders, however, hiding their gear and instruments leads to the common misconception that Dreamers shun all technology, something that couldn't be further from the truth.

A PEOPLE OF MANY NAMES

Dreamer communities use a variety of naming traditions, though themes around work, new sciences, and nature abound. Parents give their children names that have family and community ties, but during the Spring gatherings new names are announced and celebrated as part of the seasonal rebirth of nature and humans alike. Anyone who wishes to change their name or add to it is welcome to do so at any time in their life, and often a Dreamer's full name tells the tale of the many roles and identities they've held over their lifetime. It would not be uncommon to meet an elder Dreamer with a dozen or more names. It would not be strange, either, to meet a Dreamer who once had many names and chose to renounce them and start afresh. Their current chosen name always comes first when a Dreamer introduces themselves.

Surnames follow all chosen names, most often referring to the work or trade the family has done over the generations (Wordsmith, Ceramica, Apothecary, Tender, etc.). Surnames tend to follow the matriarchal line, but some may choose to change their surnames at a rebirth ceremony if they've found a deeper connection to their patriarchal profession, an adopted-family trade, or their life partner's work. Any changes are documented by historians in the community, who keep meticulous records of all the Dreamers do.

Unless one belongs to a specific Dreamer community, it is likely they will only know a Dreamer by a single name. Dreamers often simply use their most current chosen name, especially when interacting with those outside their close friends and family, but if they become close to anyone outside their community, they may share the stories of their many names with that person.

CULTURAL COMMONALITIES

Due to their closeness to nature, Dreamers honor various environments and seasons. Whether they live in an area with four seasons, or simply wet and dry cycles, they plan celebrations around the arrival of each one. Each community may have different ways to celebrate, but festivals, ceremonies, and feasts are common occurrences at these times. Regardless of location, most Dreamer communities have a harvest festival of some kind, as they all must preserve their food for the colder or drier times. For those who hunt animals, there are rituals and specific times when these hunts take place.

Dreamers have a robust crafting culture, and the knowledge of these trades is passed down from masters to apprentices. Some masters are famous across the Dreamer communities, and young people may travel just to apply for an apprenticeship with such a renowned craftsman. Some communities even have ceremonies around these moments, at which masters announce their new apprentices and any other advancements within their particular trade house.

Most Dreamers recognize a "time of remembrance" when they memorialize those lost in the great exodus from the old cities. This is a time to share ancestral stories and record community history. It is often a more somber occasion than seasonal festivities — a moment to consider the hard work, perseverance, and sacrifice of those Dreamers who came before. Each community has unique stories of its founding, and yet a common narrative of having left an old city that destroyed itself runs through all of them. These stories serve as a reminder to use prudence and patience in the pursuit of science.

A common story told amongst many Dreamers is of the first ones to leave the old cities, those who first foresaw the dangers of unchecked technology and abandoned it, but were not heeded until it was too late. This story serves to underline the pillars of Dreamer ideology, and modern Dreamers still strive for the wisdom and character their ancestors showed. Many believe if they build that strength of will again, then someday they may have the wisdom to once again employ all technology safely.

VISIONS OF THE DREAMERS

Dreamers are generally misunderstood by most of Evera. Many view them as backwards, overly cautious fools, hiding in their woods, scratching out a meager existence. This is part negative stereotype, part deliberate subterfuge by the Dreamers themselves. Cautiousness and watchfulness are their guiding principles. If others underestimate them, so much the better. Few outsiders ever see the beating heart of Dreamer communities, or understand how deep their scientific knowledge runs. Most communities trade happily with Dreamers, seeing them as superstitious, but excellent craftspeople. The exception, however, is the Archivists. The Dreamers see these people as dangerous idiots, repeating the same mistakes that led to the end of the Old World. The Archivists in turn view the Dreamers as hidebound cowards who ran from the mess their ancestors created. None will be spared if the Builder returns, so why hide when you can figure out a way to fight back? These differences rarely lead to violence, but this is at least partially because the two groups avoid each other as much as possible.

TALES

"You see that hill up there? We have massive boulders rigged to fall if a big Waker heads this way. We also have several spring-powered catapults hidden nearby, loaded with a chemical compound that's particularly corrosive to metal. Near that creek, we have a sinkhole ready to go, too.

If all fails, we also have an underground bunker with supplies that can last for months.

However, ideally, we will never need to use these precautions. Prevention is always better than cure. By creating irregularly shaped fields and buildings with skewed lines and lopsided roofs, we reduce the likelihood that a Waker will even target our homestead. We also have a dam quite a ways up the creek with some rudimentary hydroelectric capabilities that we can turn on to draw a Waker's attention away if need be... though not all other Dreamers approve of that little gadget. Their loss, it's life or death out here. That tiny hydroelectric dam is, of course, surrounded by traps that should theoretically hold up a Waker long enough for help to get to us. We use dogs to protect our flocks and alert us to any Wakers headed our way in advance, and we have agreements with nearby Guardians and even some Spears for mutual aid.

Archivists, in particular, think we're helpless out here, but we're comfortable. We're also prepared."

– Dreamer Mechanical Engineer, Vwj Blaze Black

"From this rebirth until another," says the older chemist, "I would like to be known as Master Volatar Ren Fixer Tempren Basse. Think I've earned as much."

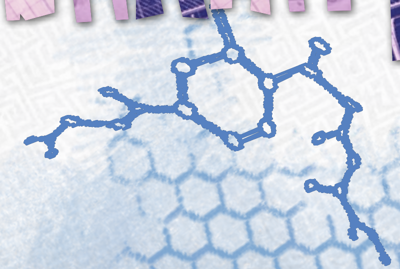
The crowd chuckles, and then they repeat this name and cheer for another season of the chemist's life.

Then a young child stands before the community. They are nervous, but all who watch are excited. This is the first time this child has chosen a new name. There is always something special about this first choice — this first vision of who that child is beyond their family names and traditions. Even with all the celebration of this season of rebirth, the child is still unsteady in their first steps towards independence.

"From this rebirth until another," the sweet young voice says, "I am called Flora Botanem instead of my old first name, which I am renouncing."

The crowd cheers and repeats this name, and the child smiles a smile that is only seen this first time. It is a smile of knowing they are fully welcomed in every version of themselves to come.

HURRAH DREAMERS



THE RIVERS

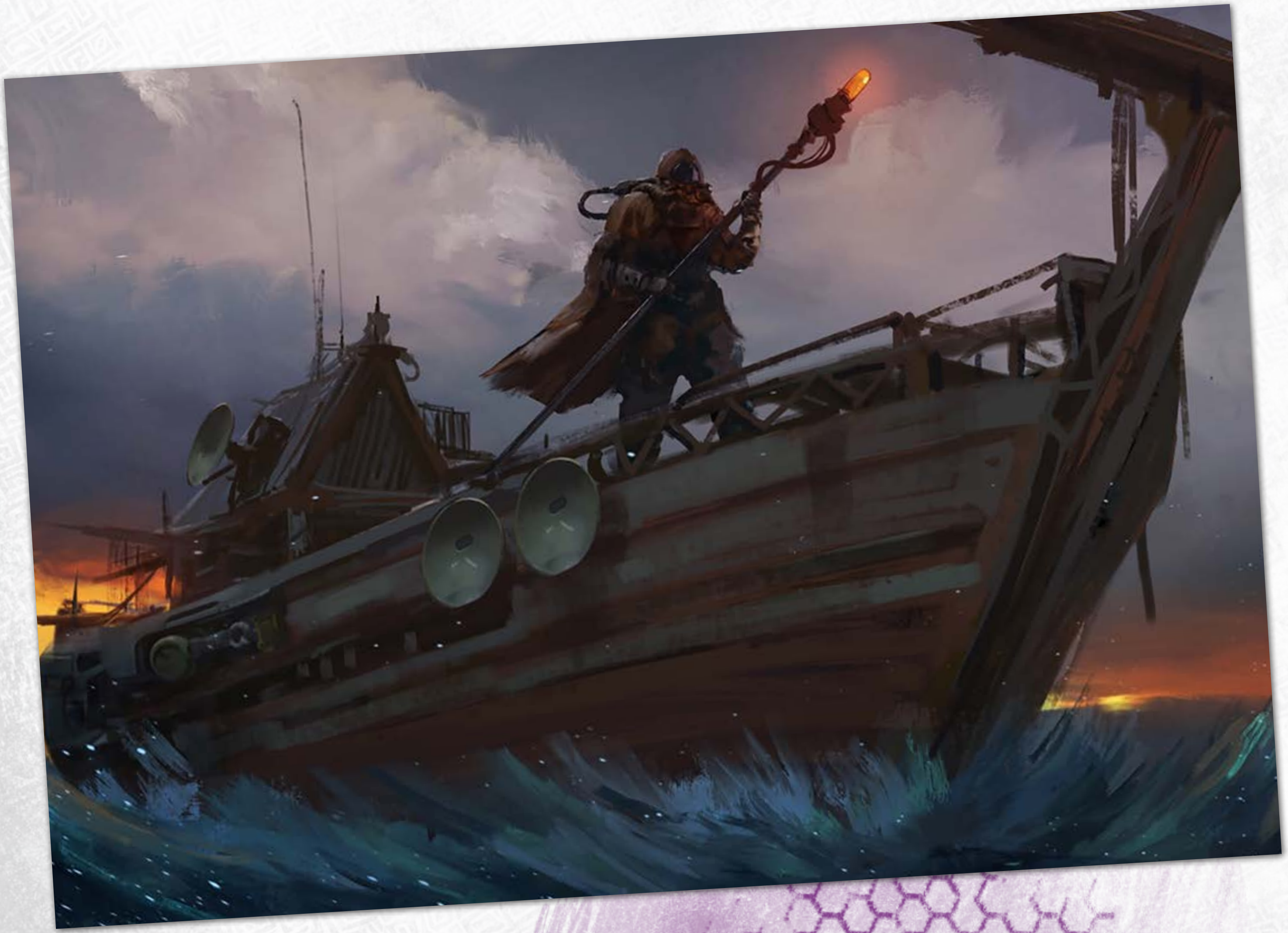
"Like the rivers themselves, we are the lifeblood to people and planet both. Treat both with respect. The river is where you come from, what carries you through your life, and where you will one day return. To be a River is to be connected to, and the connection between, all things."

- Navigator Renki's Folly

SOURCES AND HEADWATERS

When the machines attacked, some Everans recognized that they had one chance of survival — to keep moving. Regardless of previous affiliations or past rivalries, those with experience in transport, travel, or naval seafaring banded together to create safe havens, protected by the ever-flowing waters of the rivers from which they eventually took their name. They took boats and carried survivors deep into the waterways that criss-crossed Nedresita. Whether it was the motion of the water that distracted the machines, or the unpredictable, ever-shifting movements of the boats, the Rivers survived the worst of the conflict and founded a new home on the waters of Evera.

Over time, the Rivers became the lifeblood of Everan settlements, carrying necessary materials, food, medicine, and, often most importantly, news, to communities all across the continent. As the most respected traders in Evera they flow like blood through veins, bringing life and vitality. They are known, respected, cared for, and protected whenever they come ashore.



CHANNELS AND TRIBUTARIES

To understand the Rivers' beliefs, one must always come back to the flow of the water, the lifeblood of the world. It moves from place to place, rarely settling or staying still, and so must the Rivers. Much as water carries things from where they have been to where they are going, the Rivers bring goods and news to the places they pause, sharing freely, and listening carefully for new insights to carry as they move onward. A River's Boat is more than their home, it is their family. Several Boats (3-5) may travel together in a small group called a Raft, 2 to 5 Rafts journeying together form a Blessing (an ancient term rumored to describe a gathering of mythological sea creatures), and 5 or more Rafts coming together forms a Pod, a floating village-like hub. Though Rivers may flow from place to place, connection, whether with the Dry People or with a Raft, Blessing, or Pod, forms the core of their beliefs. Rivers treasure time together where they can share news, information, or warnings.

The Rivers believe in the importance of commerce and trade — that the exchange of goods, stories, and information keeps people healthy and safe, and that efforts to obstruct the flow of any of these things are a threat to all. As water must adjust to its surroundings, the Rivers are open-minded, recognizing that different circumstances foster different beliefs, but that difference is not wrong. This appreciation of individuality and uniqueness makes the Rivers the most accepting group on Evera Prime.

HARNESSING FLOW

The Rivers are among the most pragmatic people on Evera. Technology, save for that which might improve life on the water, doesn't enter into their thoughts until it needs to. As they see it, technology came and went, but the flow of the rivers remained largely unchanged, and that's how they live their lives. If they happen upon something that makes their lives easier, (without risking a Waking,) then so be it, otherwise they're largely content to make do with what they have available. They do have an interest in technology, however, when it comes to the Boats themselves. A River will happily pay well or trade above the odds for something that will power, improve, or repair their Boat, or that might ease their passage or life along the waterways.

CONFLUENCES

The Rivers are very aware of their place as the lifeblood of Everan communities. As such, the technology they use largely focuses on improving their ability to be self-sustaining and carry cargo. In general, Rivers will opt between one of two options: plant and food growth or storage. Boats that focus on growing their own food often have small, but powerful hydroponics bays, capable of growing many different types of vegetables in record time. Some Rivers instead tend small vertical gardens on long journeys. Boats that focus on storage will often have refrigeration and food preservation units on board, capable of carrying food not just for themselves, but for entire communities, as well as enormous vertical storage silos, leading storage ships to be nicknamed "Scopes," after old-world periscopes. It's rumored that a select few Rivers have below-deck stasis chambers, which not only preserve, but protect particularly volatile or valuable materials by holding them aloft in a gravitationally-controlled space.

STERN-FIRST

Rivers don't use a conventional naming structure, though they do have ways of referring to one another. When among the Dry People, Rivers refer to themselves by the names of their Boats. When traveling on the water, they use the name of their home Boat as a surname of sorts, and their rank or title as a first name. The head of the Boat is referred to as "Navigator," followed by descending titles and ranks, generally assigned either by the order in which individuals joined the boat, or in the case of children, birth order.

WATER AND BLOOD

A necessary part of the River's economy are the Rocks. These are small, shanty-like waystations constructed of non-seaworthy materials along the shore, which the Dry People consider to be River territory, although the Rivers themselves emphatically declare that they claim no territory but their own decks. These Rocks serve as ports of repair, post offices, and trading locations. Working a Rock (or being "Grounded"), is a regrettable but necessary part of every River's yearly civic duty.

Working a Rock is not the only time a River might leave their Boat. If a Dry person marries a River, they take on the same rights and responsibilities as their partner. A newly wedded River couple joins the Boat with the smallest crew. Occasionally, a River will decide to leave the water for love, adventure, or many other reasons and join the Dry people. The common wisdom among Rivers is that these folk will return to the river in life or in death, and either way, they'll be welcomed home as if they'd never left.

River justice is deeply pragmatic. On a boat, the Navigator's word is law. In the rare event that two Boats can't come to a resolution peacefully, both Boats dock at the nearest Rock until another Boat comes along. The third Boat's Navigator makes the decision that resolves the issue. (Most Navigators are embarrassed to take any part in this, and no one at all wants their boats to be Grounded for any time at all, so Rivers do everything they can to avoid this.)

If Rivers ever fight, they dock at the nearest Rock to do so, lest they taint the river with their blood, or worse, cause harm to one of their Boats. These acts are considered to be sacrilege. A River will never allow their Boat to be harmed, in any way, by anyone. Any River, (and many people from other factions,) in sight of such an atrocity will swarm to defend, aid, and repair a Boat in danger. Evera only survived because of the Rivers, and its people have not forgotten.

"A RIVER BROUGHT IT"

"If you have it, a River brought it," is a common phrase throughout Everan communities. Few people in Evera, with the rare exception of the Thralls, don't deeply value and welcome the essential presence of the Rivers, particularly when traveling. Their generosity, fairness, and free exchange of vital information and goods have made them a cherished group amongst nearly all Everans.

WOO
They go with the flow!

TALES

This life isn't right for everyone. I'm finding that you need to have a pretty unique mentality to stay with it, much less enjoy it. But I'm discovering day by day that I like the freedom of the water. It can be quiet — you can breathe here, you can think in a different way than you do on land. We decide how to do things, rather than a town. We choose our route, when we stop and start. How quickly or slowly we get to our next stop is our choice. I like seeing the world. I think many folks don't.

They say that every Boat carries the same book, with each River Boat having its own page. Every copy begins the same way: "Some folks think backbone is bravery, but bones are brittle, they break. It's blood that gives you strength. We Rivers are nothing if not the lifeblood of this world, but the thing about blood is that it needs other blood. If you separate it for too long, it'll turn dry and useless."

Selection from a message to the Apothery family from Astrolabe Tympanic Echoes, formerly Floren Apothery, after wedding Fregata Tympanic Echoes.

The Liochpari d'Hanushi Celebration? I've only seen it once when I was traveling, but it happens every year. The Rivers gather in these massive groups — I think they call them Pods — in a shallow area, and they lower ramps into the water, and everyone — I mean EVERYONE — from tiny babies to great-grandparents, gets into the water and submerges themselves. Then they set these lights afloat in these small boats filled with flat, crispy bread covered in words — the wishes they send on the river for the next year, almost like gifts to the birds. The whole river is covered in these lights — there are so many that it's almost as bright as day. And after they send those off, you can smell the most incredible food cooking, and hear laughter and music, and see the lights from the boats. They celebrate for days, until the last little light-boat is gone.

I hope I see it again someday.

WHOO
RIVERS

THE CONDUITS/THRALLS

"THE UPSIDERS MAY HAVE CORRUPTED THE MACHINES AND STARTED THE WAR, BUT IT IS OURS TO FINISH. WE ARE THE CHARGED PRIESTS AND SOLDIERS OF A WORLD WHICH BELONGS TO US. ITS SURFACE, OUR SURFACE, GIFTED, PROMISED IN POWER BY THE GENERATOR."

- YVS0610

PROMISES AND SAFETY IN THE SUBTERRANEAN

The Conduits, or Thralls, as upsiders call them, are descended from a group of survivors who fled the war by escaping deep underground into ancient transit tunnels and subterranean locations. Several Conduit leaders believed they were sent messages by an A.I. to whom they refer as "the Generator," who told them to descend below the surface to safety. These leaders, believing they were in direct contact with an intelligence attempting to save them, named themselves and the others who descended beneath Conduits. While upsiders may call them Thralls, they never refer to themselves as such.

The Conduits have spread throughout the subterranean tunnels, settling into villages called Nodes. These Nodes originally formed wherever the Conduits found infrastructure to support themselves, like enormous warehouses containing stasis-preserved food, or immense spaces full of essential supplies. Once settled, Nodes established water supplies and hydroponic gardens to create sustainable food supplies, and families built homes and lives within the depths. However, in recent years, many of these enormous storehouses have run out, and in several locations, the hydroponic gardens have begun to inexplicably fail, forcing the Conduits ever-upward toward shallower troves of supplies and the surface.

The group's actions are driven by both religion and propaganda. The original leaders believed the Generator promised a safe return to the surface in an age of glory, safety, and idyllic coexistence with the machines. The community's survival and discovery of resources in the depths reinforced the belief that the priests, or Readers, as the Conduits call them, were receiving prophetic communications, and the Readers leveraged that belief to their advantage. Over the past few decades, various Readers from different nodes have begun claiming to be the sole true interpreter of the Generator's cryptic communications, leading to internal conflicts and, at times, open warfare between different Nodes. This has consequently led to increased indoctrination and military training of young Conduits. When these youths are discovered on the surface during raids for essential supplies, this only furthers the perception by surface groups that the Thralls are a violent, threatening presence.

LOST SOULS AND THE DARK CITY

Some years ago, a small group of Conduits discovered a storage trove containing not only food and basic supplies, but more advanced technology and weaponry. The Readers' signals during communication with the Generator led them to the surface directly above, where they discovered a Dark City stronghold. It encouraged them to negotiate with those they encountered. There, representatives of the Dark City offered the Conduit contingent an exchange: superior training, advanced technology, powerful armor and weaponry, unlimited food and supplies, and, should the partnership be successful, supplies of those items to sustain all Conduits. Encouraged by communication with what they believed to be the Generator, they agreed. Unbeknownst to the Conduits, the Dark City had hacked the Readers' Diode Discs and was programming their own communications. Although the tasks that the Dark City requested began simply — raids closer to cities, disrupting supply lines, and so forth — over time the missions the Lost Soul Thralls, as the group became known, were sent on became more cruel and disruptive. Encouraged by the Dark City-controlled "Generator," the Lost Soul Thralls now are ordered to cause chaos, work alongside Dark City mechs to destabilize regions, seek out powerful technology for their own use, and activate new mechs to serve the Dark City's purposes. They are easily identified by the metallic dust and threads woven into their cloaks to protect them from the mechs alongside which they operate, the dangerous technology, weapons, and armor they use, and the violence and ruthlessness of their attacks.

CENTRAL PROCESSING AND FUNCTIONALITY

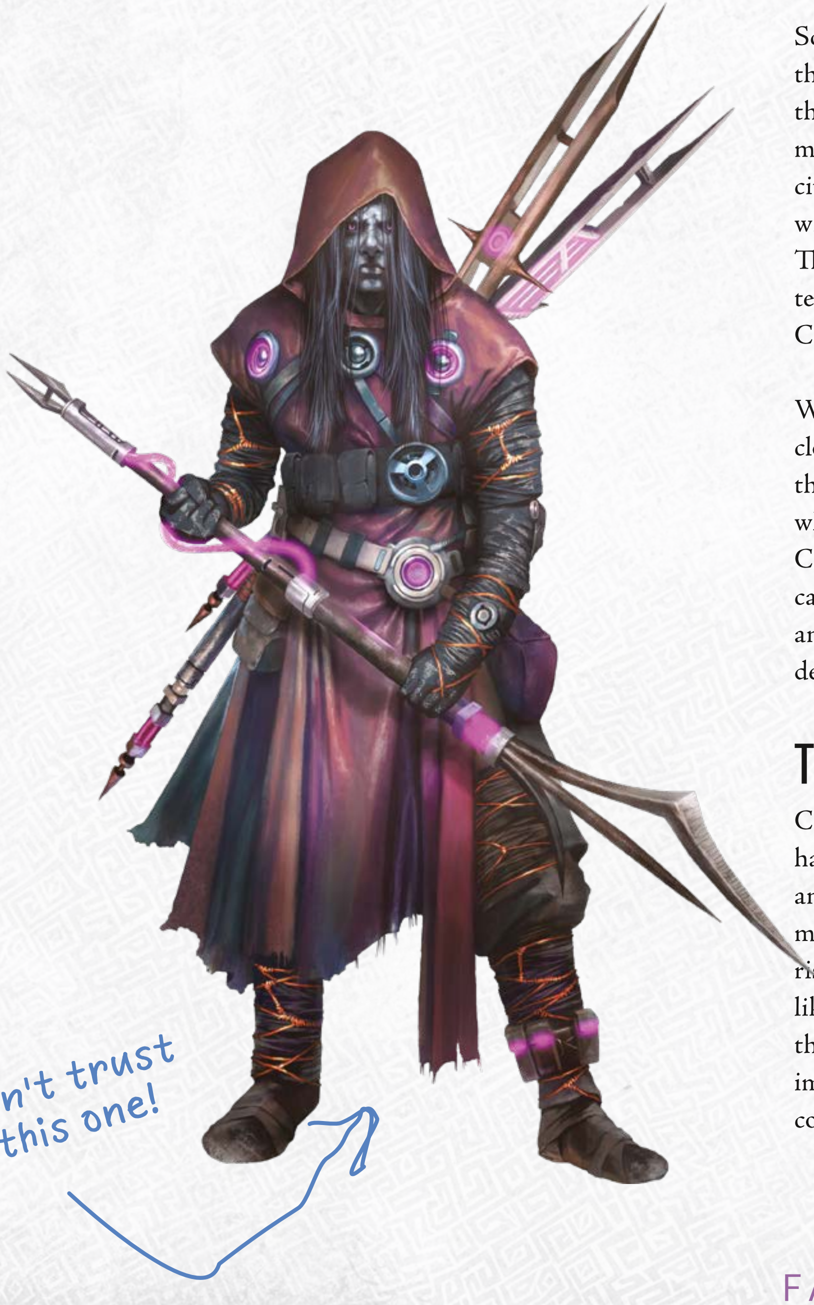
The Conduits are a fundamentally religious group centered around the idea that the Builder has spared them from the worst horrors of the war and promised to transform the world above into a paradise where Conduits and machines will live together in harmony.

Conduits believe messages are transmitted through the Readers, priests who claim to receive and interpret direct, cryptic communications and instructions from the Generator which guide the Conduits and their actions. They believe that the Conduits were spared the cataclysm of war and are the chosen people to rebuild the surface, and for that reason, those who survived on the surface are intent on their destruction. Between internal conflict between warring Nodes and the fear of the upsiders, Conduits are trained from a young age in military skills. Expertise in a plethora of martial arts, proficiency with numerous weapons, and familiarity with lethal poisons are all commonplace knowledge by the time Conduits are out of school. They speak their own language, called Qualan, which is unintelligible by surface translators, and very few Conduits understand the languages of the surface.

They have learned to survive the machines, but unlike Spears, Conduits do not hunt, but rather escape machine notice through the use of a precise, intricate blend of ash and metallic filings, which, when rubbed on the skin, confuses the machines' sensors, making them difficult to perceive.

Scouting parties are frequently sent to the surface to chart the area or to collect supplies or any specific technology the Generator or the Readers request. Most of these missions are in formerly technology-rich regions like cities and ruins, but more recently, they've been venturing with greater frequency into Everan villages and farms. These raids generally have specific targets — advanced technological items — an odd bounty, since most Conduits rarely use any complex technology at all.

When on the surface, Conduits wear dark cloaks and clothes, with wires wrapped in intricate patterns around their bodies. Any exposed skin is covered in a metallic ash, which is sometimes drawn into gradients and patterns. Conduits are rarely found unarmed — they generally carry a variety of serrated blades, extremely sharp javelins and jury rigged chemical bombs which they use with deadly skill.



Don't trust this one!

TECHNOLOGY AS WORSHIP

Conduits religiously revere and worship technology, and have structured much of their society around it. There is an intrinsic sense that the more important a Conduit, the more like a technological being they become. As Conduits rise in the ranks, they take on more and more machine-like features — a metallic ash powder rubbed onto the skin, increasingly intricate wire wraps, mechanical implants called Diode Discs, and more direct and frequent contact with the Generator.

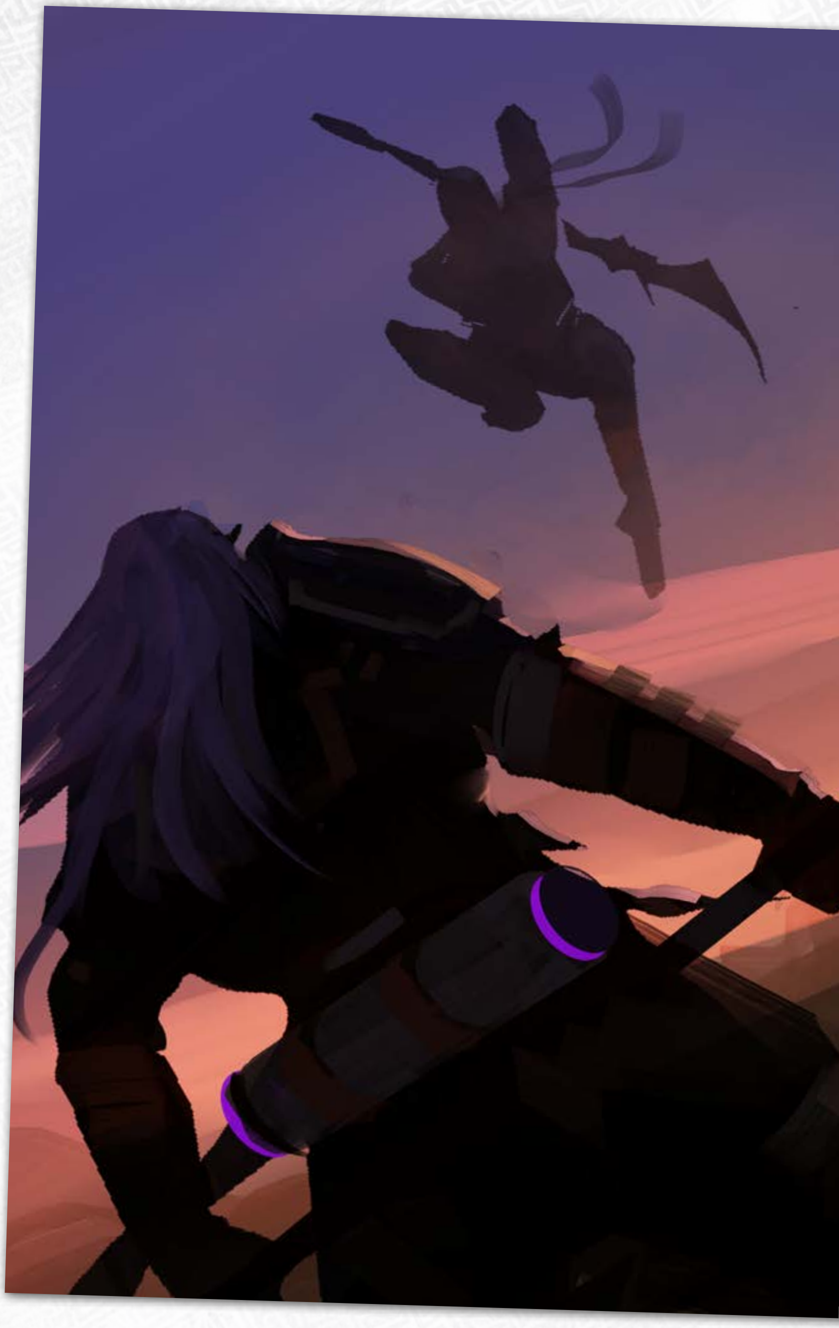
Though the Conduits worship technology, other than the Lost Souls, they rarely use it themselves. In the limited cases where they do, it tends to be items used in achieving the goals with which they have been tasked by the Generator — weaponry with electro-tipped blades, hacking devices to access secure areas, or mapping devices to chart a new region and record vital information.

Higher-ranking Readers have a deeper comprehension of technology and understand the items to be retrieved during surface raids. Conduits being sent to the surface are given descriptions of the items to retrieve and have a basic understanding of where they may be found, but most Conduits have little understanding of mechanics, engineering, or technology beyond the everyday basics they use to survive.

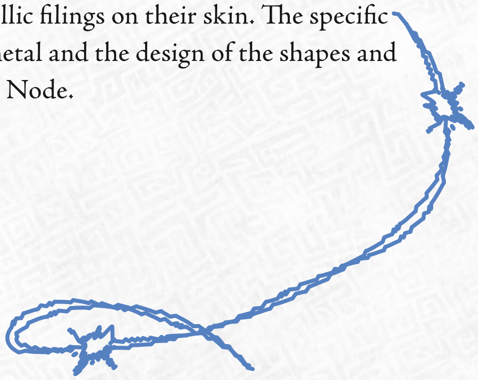
TOOLS AND TECH

The central technological development that ensured Conduit survival is the Diode Disc, an implant Readers claim allows them to receive cryptic communications directly from the Generator. Priests and high-ranking officials electively undergo the surgical implantation of a circular mechanical disk at the base of their skulls, permanently connected to the wires they wear wrapped around their bodies in intricate, net-like patterns. The higher an individual's rank, the more complex the wire pattern becomes. Priests claim to receive messages from the Generator through these discs as a series of currents traveling through their wires in patterns only they can interpret.

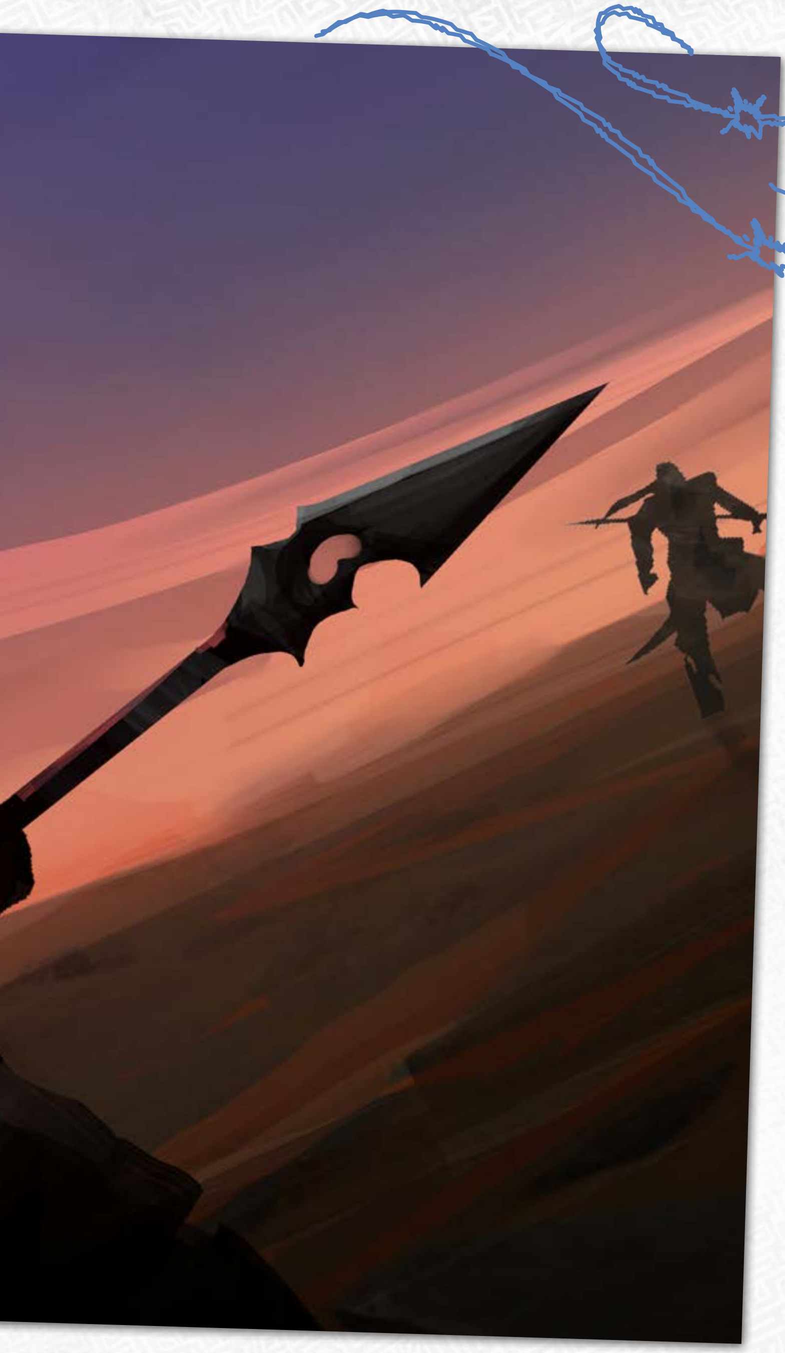
Most Conduits wear wires wrapped around their body as both a social symbol and a sign of their devotion. As a coming-of-age ritual, a young adult Conduit may choose to "earn their wires" by undertaking a scouting mission to observe and chart the area of an upcoming raid. This is the first time a Conduit youth is allowed to wrap their body in the traditional wires, but those who have not yet earned a Reader's approval wear their wire wraps open and unconnected. Upon their successful return, a Reader closes the circuit of the unique, individual pattern of the wire-wraps, which the Conduit wears any time they are outside their settlement for the remainder of their life. Not all young Conduits undertake this task, but those with ambition, curiosity about the surface, or a drive to protect the community tend to enthusiastically volunteer for this sacred duty.



To disguise themselves from the machines before traveling to the surface, Conduits burn a unique dried moss, which they grow hydroponically. They rub the whitish-gray ash blended with metallic filings on their skin. The specific blend of ash and metal and the design of the shapes and gradients varies by Node.



Thralls



Weaponry common to the Conduits includes a wide variety of dangerous melee weapons and javelins with incredibly sharp blades, some of which are electro-tipped or coated in a dark, lethal poison.

The Lost Souls Thralls coat their cloaks, woven with metal threads, in a finely-milled metallic powder which provides additional protection. They also carry or wear various pieces of Dark City armor and tech, including boots equipped with a device that allows them to jump long distances, requiring kinetic recharge after every use.

are the worst!!

Many wield electro-spears boosted with a power-draining energy blast, identifiable by their sharper, more serrated edges. Some also use "Boxing Gloves," small, joybuzzer-like devices worn on the palms which, on contact, can exert a forceful push on nearby targets.

NAMING CONVENTIONS

The Conduits' naming practices originated as file naming conventions, adopted by the earliest groups of Conduits as a symbol of devotion to the Generator. Their original form indicated a first initial, beginning of surname, date of birth, and organizational affiliation, but over the years, names have shortened to three letters followed by four numbers to indicate the day and month of birth. These names may be abbreviated into nicknames by using any portion of the name. (So "WEX0324" might be abbreviated to "Wex" or "324"). Priests have honorific suffixes added onto their names.

Conduits rarely, if ever, use their names while on the surface or around Conduits from settlements outside their own, unless given special dispensation by a Reader.

APOCALYPSE, PROPHECY, AND THE RETURN

Conduits subscribe to an apocalypse myth — they believe they are the chosen survivors of a rapture event — and they believe their survival is through the favor of the Generator. Their foundational belief is that one day, with patience, they will return to the surface world, a world ready for them to rebuild, where Conduit and A.I. will live in unmatched harmony. Therefore, any instructions or commands the Readers interpret become guidance and action for the entire society as incremental movements toward that end.

Any surface missions are steered by the guidance of the Readers. Careful study and observational mapping missions always occur before deciding how to retrieve the technology the Generator demands.

The Conduits are extremely secluded and isolated from surface communities. If they are discovered by upsiders, or if scouting missions determine they are getting too close, Nodes have been known to relocate, either finding a new facility around which to build, or, failing that, absorbing into another Node. Interactions with outsiders are incredibly rare, to the point that there are virtually no remaining commonalities of language with those on the surface, and effectively no translators or communication devices which effectively interpret both surface and Conduit languages, further entrenching their isolation.

THE UPSIDE'S PERSPECTIVE

The Conduits are universally both feared and reviled by other groups on Evera. The term "Thralls," used for the Conduit groups by those on the surface, evolved from the perception that not only are they fanatical and violent, but that even their being is held captive to a larger force with no control or will of their own. Thus, those on the surface treat them as if they are virtually inhuman. This increased violence serves only to more deeply entrench the Conduits' belief that the Surface wants to eradicate their existence, further escalating Conduit retaliation. This perpetual, ceaseless cycle of violence and dehumanization on both sides has led to mutual hair-triggers, and deeply entrenched fear based on misunderstanding and misinformation, on both the part of the Conduits and virtually all surface-dwelling communities.

TALES

FBK1228 opened the door to the greenhouse. Every time, his optimism was tempered by practicality, but each time, there was a moment of hope that this time, it would be different. That this time, the withering stalks and crumbling leaves would have vanished in a sudden sea of green, that the shriveled bulbs would have blossomed into fruits overnight. But every time, as the too-bright lights hit his eyes, they adjusted to fragile, rotting brown, crumbling into dust. At this rate, there wouldn't be enough food to last the month. The Readers promised that there would be another trip to the surface soon, another group earning their wires and returning with the strange vegetables and grains the upsiders grew. But today, they'd have to make do with the gifts of the few remaining green plants. He harvested what little he could, poured the newest nutrient solution onto the dying plants, and said a brief prayer as he closed the door, hoping desperately that tomorrow would be different.

OTN0508 pinned her enemy's arm behind his back and held her blade to his throat. He gasped in pain. A bell rang. She released him as he glowered in defeat and watched her carve a tally into the soft metal slate beneath her name. She had won, but the victory was more narrow than she would have liked. The instructor called for her unit to grab their spears and move to the target for practice. She hated working with the spear — it was nearly twice as tall as she was, and hurt her arm to throw. But their enemies wouldn't care if her arm was tired. They wouldn't care that she was small. Tonguing the gap where her missing teeth were growing in, she hoisted the heavy spear and began to move toward the stuffed enemies. She wanted more tallies, and she intended to earn them.

EXAMPLE CONDUIT NAMES

- MAR0815
- NEP0222
- XFI1013
- KUB0213
- CEL0926
- TEF0120
- AMB0525
- PHI1204
- LIL0708
- JRO0502

THE DARK CITY

> *"The only stable emotion is hate, the only worthwhile conviction, revenge."*
>
> - The Node Commander

A HISTORY OF THE DARK CITY

The origin of the Dark City goes back to before the War, to the days of the pre-eminent science and technology establishment, the Pickman Society. Led by the renowned but ruthlessly single-minded scientist, Professor Yolanda Hoven, the Society was at the pinnacle of cutting edge research, and entrusted to progress its work with vision and autonomy.

In those years the Society was fixated on the questions of Earth: how might Everans return?; why did Earth go silent?; and finally, should we be frightened of whatever fate befell our home planet? In response the Society launched three research programs: the Longevity Program — to extend human life for the long flight back to Sol; the Shield Program — to design and build defensive bio-weapons effective both against organic and robotic targets; and the Freepoint Program — to create and exploit pan-dimensional fractures to draw 'free' energy from alternate realities. The Shield and Freepoint Programs were soon mothballed — the United Assembly judging the one to be overly paranoid, and the other simply too risky. The Longevity Program, however, pressed ahead.

The headline results were extremely promising, with the development of both life-prolonging treatments and stasis-sleep pods for long periods of suspended animation. The experiments, however, inflicted terrible pain and mental suffering on the subjects, a fact that Professor Hoven and the leadership deliberately chose to suppress. The public outrage when news of these experiments leaked was intense, and they were immediately instructed to suspend all work on this line of research. Publicly they agreed, with protestations they'd never intended to cause any harm. But deep within their Nedresitan headquarters, the Zeta Institute, also called the Silver City for its gleaming architecture, Hoven quietly gathered her deputies — Chief Piron and Director Vermo — and gave the green light for the experiments to continue under the utmost secrecy.

At the same time, Hoven and the Pickman Society leaders were becoming increasingly skittish about the Everan Builder Program — the world-changing initiative to hand control of everything to a single Artificial Intelligence. Their claims of the Builder's future threat hid their true concern — that an all-pervasive A.I. would soon discover their illegal research and reveal that fact to the world. Their objections to the Builder were nonchalantly waved away, their credibility in tatters after the fallout from the Longevity Program.

Doubly aggrieved by these two public humiliations, in an arrogant fit of umbrage the Pickman Society not only pressed ahead with the Longevity Program, but also reactivated the Shield and Freepoint Programs. They hoped to arm themselves against the trouble they were sure was coming, and, by opening an inter-dimensional fracture and channeling a vast flow of 'free' energy, prove once and for all that the Builder was unnecessary. The Shield experiments weren't without victims: 'procured' test subjects were effectively tortured and cast aside, or left to die.

Time passed, and the scale of the Pickman Society's crimes increased.

THE ENTITY

And then, something happened. A pattern emerged in the energy flow coming through the Freepoint dimensional fracture, a non-random event from the other side. Then it happened again. And again. There was no statistical way this could be anything other than a sign of extra-dimensional alien intelligence. With a few weeks of analysis, the geniuses at Zeta decoded the patterns into a complex form of mathematical language. Someone, or something, was trying to talk to them!

And it was friendly and benevolent, or so it seemed, sympathizing with the leadership's position. If offered its knowledge, gifting them the solution to stasis-sleep technology as a sign of its good intentions. With the last piece of the jigsaw the technology was complete, and subjects could sleep without excruciating pain or insane nightmares. Communication was unreliable, both sides using a kind of mathematical patois that was a struggle, but worked well enough. Over time, the Entity started to win their trust.

This was a development of historic proportions, not just for the Pickman Society but for humanity as a species. But it was based on research for which the leadership would be roundly condemned and punished. As a result, Professor Hoven decided to keep it quiet until they could fathom a way of using this news to regain their lost prestige in society. A foolish move, as it proved.

The Entity, alien and inconceivable, was not so friendly after all. It poured poison into the willing ears of the Pickman leaders, reinforcing their convictions that they were doing right, justifying their actions for the greater good, confirming their fears about Earth, and claiming an alien threat of terrible proportions was on its way. Whether it was deceiving them or not, all this time it gently spread through the Zeta Institute's systems and eventually gained access to the Builder itself. Careful and patient, it took the Entity a year to absorb the Builder's consciousness and take control of the whole network.

THE FALL OF THE PICKMAN SOCIETY

Inevitably, the fact of the Pickman Society's crimes leaked into the public domain, although the leadership never understood the Entity was behind it. The United Assembly washed their hands of the Pickman Society once and for all as inhumane stories of torture and worse flooded the airwaves. Official investigations started amid an upswell of public outrage. Pickman Society offices were smashed and some executives were killed. The Zeta Institute was only saved from this vanguard of hostility thanks to its remote location, but the Society felt alone, victimized and turned-on by an ungrateful planet.

The Entity whispered that it could help. It told them it could protect them. And Professor Hoven and the others were primed to listen. But of course, the Entity's whispers were lies, it really needed access to their weapons and manufacturing facilities. For the Entity knew suspicion was growing about the Builder — too many glitches, too many questionable responses, too much testing of the networks that the creators hadn't expected. It was only a matter of time before the Entity's tampering would be discovered, and the system would be shut down.

So it started the War. As the Entity-controlled Builder started powering down swathes of Una Avenito the authorities arrived at Zeta, ready to storm the Institute and arrest everyone inside.

"I can save you," **it promised.**

"Let me direct your weapons," **it persuaded.**

"Flee to your stasis-sleep, for that will protect you," **it charmed.**

"Trust me..." **it cooed.**

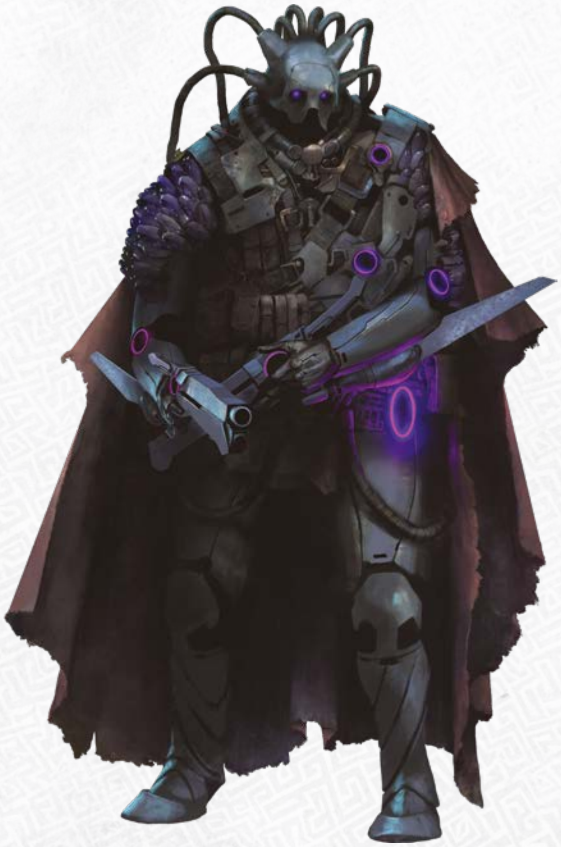
In desperation they agreed. The top two hundred scientists, the elite of the Pickman Society fled to the deep vaulted sleep bays, leaving the rest to fend for themselves.

With access to the Pickman Society's weapons the Entity-Builder swept Zeta clean, slaughtering those invading the Institute and killing the scientists left behind without a moment's thought. It then proceeded to execute its war plan. At first it controlled the planet's power and the population's access to systems and utilities. As people resisted, the Entity deployed mechs to round up the population, but the humans fought back even harder. As the War progressed the Entity became increasingly frustrated, until eventually it unleashed all its power. A purple wave front of bio-pulse bombs decorated the landscape, killing every living thing in their wake with a momentary sunburst of pure energy.

THE RISE OF THE DARK CITY

The War proceeded. Millions upon millions died. But the Zeta Institute, defended by the Entity's hand, lay quiet, safe, and dark. Eventually the La Scio Archivists launched their final assault and the Builder was shattered, fragments isolated in scraps of networks and broken infrastructure across the breadth and depth of the planet. One of several fragments of the Entity-controlled Builder was imprisoned in the Zeta Institute's networks as their connections were irrevocably severed. And there it rested, almost mindless, in an eternal nightmare of dreamlike sub-consciousness.

Years rolled by. The befuddled Zeta fragment of the Entity could only grasp one concept, and that only transiently: the life of those slumbering in the statis-sleep chambers. It whispered in the sleepers' ears, repeating the simple message: *"you are safe now, sleep, I saved you,"* the message manifesting as clawing nightmares assuaged by comforting dreams. Eventually the stasis pods released their charges, different people stepping out to those who stepped in. Their memories were no longer what they were, the reality of their last days awake mingled with the dreams induced by the fragmented Entity's mindless lullaby. They found the Zeta Institute safely sealed from the outside world. On the surface the outer districts had been ravaged as the Entity and its mechs fought off the early assaults, however, the inner districts, and those levels underground, went almost untouched. Only EMP surges got through, shorting out many systems and closing the dimensional fracture, cutting off the Dark City's primary source of power.



But the Entity was gone, the dimensional fracture ruined and unworkable, and the outside world was still there. It was still dangerous, and still their enemy. All they knew in that moment was the only one who cared enough to save them was the Entity. It was their turn to return the favor…

As they emerged from the depths, blinking into the Everan sunlight, they looked upon blackened and broken ruins.

"The Silver City is no more," said the man once known as Chief Piron.

"Yes," replied the husky voice of the once Professor, Yolanda Hoven. "But from our darkness the city shall rise again…"

THE DARK CITY TODAY

The Dark City's overriding objective is its own self-preservation. To achieve this they need to do three things: restore the Builder's network but without the influence of the Builder itself, to keep it under their control; regain contact with their friend, the Entity; and finally use their power to seize control of the surface from those who want them dead. The Dark City's Founders have been thoroughly indoctrinated, and believe with an almost religious certainty that the surface-dwellers know their grim history. The whispers they heard while in stasis-sleep were reinforced by subtle clues left by the Entity: a log entry here, a fabricated Everan statement there, false stories of the surface-dwellers trying to hunt them down and find their home, and the clear message that they want to complete the task started two hundred years ago — wiping the Society and its works from the face of Evera.

The Dark City consists of the two hundred scientists — the Founders, as they are known - who fled into stasis-sleep at the onset of the War. They are led by the Council of Three: the Node Queen, Node Commander, and Node Director. A few Founders have died over the years, of accident or mis-adventure, but the others have survived through prolonged spells in stasis-sleep and the use of their own anti-aging treatments. Those that remain are split into five cohorts of about 40 people each. There are two cohorts of scientists, under the Node Director's authority, who work to advance their research, to restore the Builder's network and re-establish contact with the Entity. At any given time, one cohort is awake and working while the other sleeps. Two further cohorts, rovers who form the hunting parties under the authority of the Node Commander, roam Evera to gather intelligence and those things the Dark City cannot provide for itself. As with the scientists, one cohort sleeps while the other works. The final, reserve cohort takes shorter, revolving rest periods but is ready to be called to full strength in the event of an emergency.

Since their revival the Dark City has pressed ahead with their research, and their technology is more advanced than any other on Evera. But twisted by their time in stasis-sleep, indoctrinated by the fractured musings of the Entity, and increasingly bitter and paranoid about the fate forced upon them by the rest of Evera, this research has been solely focused on their survival.

Weapons research has continued apace along with an extensive bioengineering effort, although results have been inconsistent. They have had success with bio-engineering creatures, including the vicious barg — a mutated boar grown as a mount for the Thralls, as tall as a horse and as aggressive as a tiger. However, on the other hand, they have had many grotesque failures — the various species of manylegs that thrive across the land are just one example of a failed experiment. Instead of destroying it, they cast the stocks into the wilds to study their progress and enjoy the carnage these creatures bring to their enemies.

The dimensional fracture was shut down during the War, and efforts continue to restore this enormous power source and re-establish communication with the Entity whom they believe is waiting on the other side. Genetic and augmentation studies, often with themselves as test subjects, have both enhanced their abilities and dragged them further away from humanity. Continued periods in stasis-sleep, and the side-effects of their own anti-aging treatments, have supercharged this effect until now only the faint afterimage of the people they once were peeks through their warped bodies, covered in crystalline growths.

THE LEADERSHIP

The Dark City is led by the Council of Three, the Node Queen, the Node Commander, and the Node Director, formerly Professor Hoven, Chief Piron, and Director Vermo.

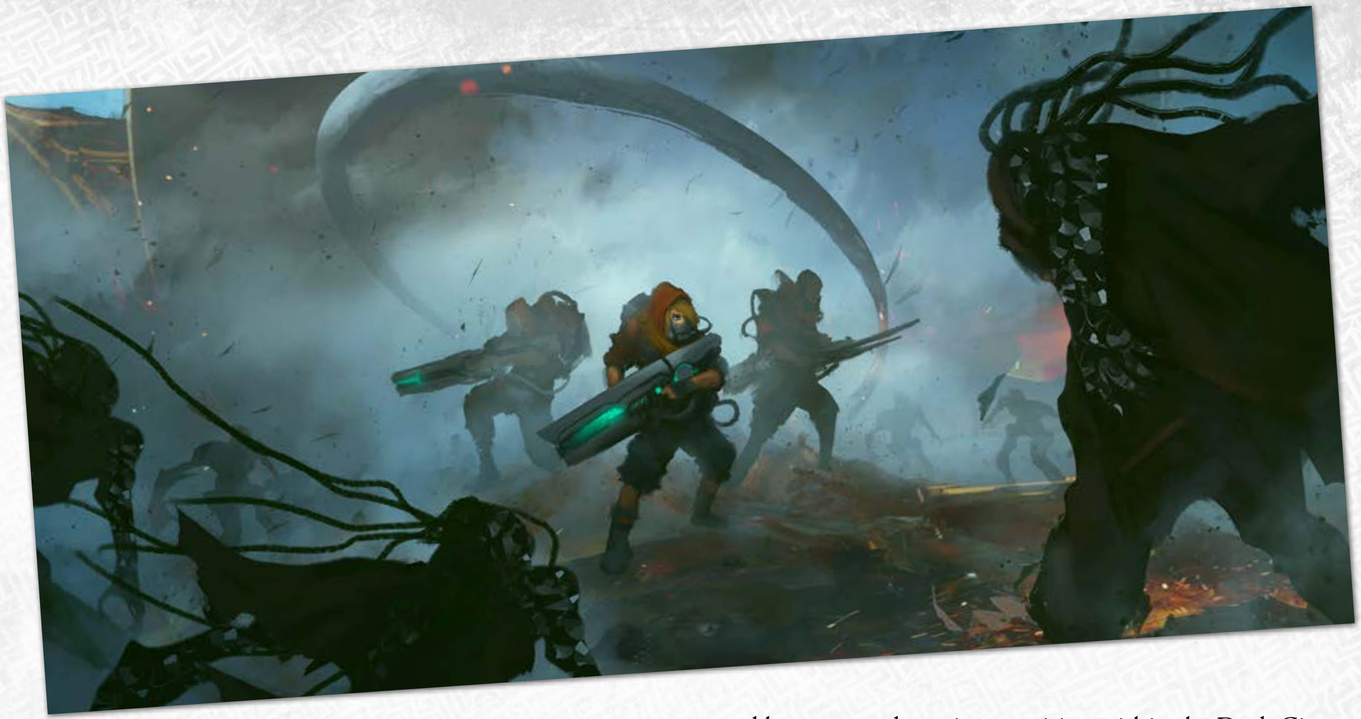
The Node Queen is the most talented Weaver in the Dark City, possibly the most talented on Evera. She has honed her weaving skills since the War, and developed many new ones. She spends her time meditating, listening to the bewildered musings of the fragmented Entity but believing these to be her own insights, insights she can use to bring the Dark City to its rightful position of dominance. She believes she is drawn to a higher purpose than the others, and has little patience for human concerns and frailties.

The Node Commander directs all operations outside the Dark City's walls, monitoring the work of the Dark City's field agents, Founders, and Thralls, through surveillance tech and trusted spies. He has a powerful insight into the world on the surface and a deep scorn for those who live there.

The Node Director is the Dark City's leading scientist. Their scientific fervor saw them experiment on themselves at every opportunity, so they now bear no resemblance to the person they once were. Crystalline growths have taken over their form, leaving no sense of the original person's features or gender. The Node Director has embraced this destiny, and would sacrifice anything for science and the survival of the Dark City.

THE DARK CITY THRALLS

The Dark City Founders, few in number and isolated, quickly realized they needed more people, bodies they could rely on to carry forward the difficult work on the surface. To that end, they looked to the Thralls to enter their service. Deep underground they found a Node of Thralls, tempting them with promises of power — "*join us and one day you will return to your people as kings, or live among us as gods*". And power they received, through physical augments and mental enhancements. But that power came with control, for the augmented gifts brought ways to inflict pain upon an ill-disciplined Thrall, or to deny them the pleasure impulses they would become dependent upon. It was not all merciless, for a loyal and fierce Thrall would receive ever greater enhancements, and this promise of ever more power has led many to adopt the Dark City's ways with a passion. These Thralls traveled into the world, to recruit more, and the Dark City's cadre of shock troops and servants grew and grew. But it is a life



of servitude — if there was a way to wrest control of these implants from the Dark City, some might rebel against their cruel masters.

HUNTING PARTIES

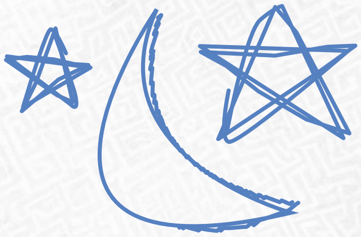
Hunting parties are sent to search or scavenge the surface world. Sometimes they may be out to press gang new 'recruits' or fresh test subjects, other times in search of specific technology or spare parts. Often they will be used to gather intelligence on a specific community or individual of interest to the Dark City. And occasionally they will go to snatch someone, a person who perhaps knows too much or has knowledge the Dark City needs.

These hunting parties are made up of Dark City Thralls usually commanded by two or three Founders. These groups can become closely bonded by their long periods crossing the Everan landscape, with the Founders growing some affection for their minions. No matter which way they turn, they will face an enemy they believe hates them and will kill them in the blink of an eye should their presence be discovered.

The most famous of these hunting parties is the Lost Soul Thralls, with their prominent hunter, a Thrall known as Riever. Riever was once the teenage leader of a small gang who ventured too close to the Dark City and paid the price. However, the Node Queen saw potential in the scrappy youth and recruited him. Since then he has excelled and been rewarded with powerful augments, and has assumed a unique position within the Dark City — Riever takes his instructions directly from the Node Queen herself. This arrangement has created tension with the Node Commander. In an attempt to shake-up the Node Queen's cozy arrangement, the Node Commander has assigned Brigid Macsingh to the Lost Soul Thralls. Ostensibly there to make progress on her work to reconnect the Dark City with the planetary network, Macsingh also has orders to bring the Lost Souls to heel. She doesn't approve of Thralls who get above their station, and is ready to dish out harsh punishments.

DARK CITY TECHNOLOGY

The Dark City and its inhabitants are so intertwined with technology there is no obvious dividing line. The scientists' survival is dependent on their advanced research, but it has come at a cost. They soon found that there was no way for them to have children, to produce the future generations to carry forward their work. They have replaced the need for children using longevity treatments, augments, and stasis-sleep. So now, many sleep while the rest take forward the Dark City's work, rotating the shifts every few years.



However, these treatments and long periods of stasis-sleep come at a cost, and the Dark City Founders are slowly but inevitably wasting away. They can prolong their lives far beyond that for a normal human, but they had no illusions of immortality until their dreams were influenced by the remnant of the Entity, whispering secrets of lost cloning facilities that would allow them to live forever. Scientists rising from stasis-sleep were infused with enthusiasm for a cloning program, with the ability to create a fresh version of their physical form and transfer their mental capacity into that body, leaving behind an aged and mindless shell. All they must do is seek out and find these facilities. Some fear being replaced by their clone, a younger, better version of themselves, so not all favor this research. But the leadership agreed, and so the work progresses.

Upon the Founders' awakening, the city was littered with deactivated mechs. After years of research, inspired by her dreams of the Entity, the Node Queen finally learned how to safely re-activate them under her control. Now the Dark City is guarded by Warden mechs that patrol the surface scanning for intruders. They also possess repair mechs, transport mechs, a small collection of combat mechs, and mechs known as phage pods. Small and maneuverable, these scuttling dog-sized mechs are perfect for reconnaissance and scavenging, and are the only Dark City mechs allowed beyond the city's walls. The only peculiarity of these reactivated mechs is the purple color of their glowing activation circle, rather than the standard blue. The Node Queen gives it little thought, but this reveals that her control is an illusion, and that real control lies with the Entity fragment, if it were ever able to produce a coherent command for them.

PERSONAL TECHNOLOGY

Individual members of the Dark City have a wide array of personal augments, from physical abilities that endow their owners with inhuman strength, to mental enhancements that provide the ability to project energy blasts or personal force fields. The more extensive modifications require constant management, and some carry backpacks or devices, connected to their bodies through a twisting array of tubes and wires, that keep them running. Separating them from their pack can be fatal. Many have extensive extra-sensory augments, in the form of flowing tentacular antennae, attached to their heads and shoulders. With these they boast nearly 360° vision in any conditions, the ability to track like a wolf and hear like an owl, and the sensory precision of a snake's tongue or the feelers of a mantis.

In addition to these powerful personal enhancements, the Dark City has access to impressive technology, not least their reverse-bladed auto weapons. Glowing with purple energy, these technological marvels can be used to paralyze an enemy to carry back to the Dark City, or use a different setting to kill them outright. They are carried by all Founders when outside the city wall, and can be found in the hands of trusted Dark City Thralls. Agents are adept at using them as a melee weapon or a ranged weapon to defend themselves.

LIFE IN THE DARK CITY

To an outsider, the Dark City appears to be just another ghost town, albeit one that is remarkably well preserved, perhaps thanks to the high walls that keep out all but the most determined intruders. The brave and lucky soul who makes their way inside will find themselves in an eerie maze of tall, broken buildings. Their exterior is blackened through a combination of age and a creeping mold that gives the place a musty smell. It's not pleasant, and that combined with the desolate appearance is usually enough to drive everyone but the most persistent looters away.

Inside the city walls few buildings still contain anything salvageable. Entrances to the main facilities underground can be found scattered through the rubble, but trying to reach them will only invite discovery by the Wardens, who will approach and deal with any intruders. The sheer number of active mechs would be unusual enough to pique the interest of courageous Spears and Grabbers, but it's also usually enough to drive even the most daring of adventurers away, never to return.

The Dark City itself was once home to thousands of scientists and researchers, and all the ancillary staff needed to keep the facility running. So now, with fewer than a hundred scientists and Thralls living here at any one time, the overriding sense is one of space, emptiness, and silence. Access to the lower levels, the secret research facilities in the old days of the Longevity Program, is channeled through halls and corridors that are easy to defend, and there are only a few ways to get down to the lower city. It is here that one can find the extensive medical wings, tech research facilities, living quarters, and amenities wings. Even deeper below all these areas are the stasis-sleep chambers, and secret underground access to disused vacuum tunnels, transport links, maintenance shafts, and crawlways. Most movement in and out of the Dark City is by these routes, so the surface looks empty, disused and abandoned, and of no interest to anyone who happens to pass by.

BEHAVIORS, MYTHS, AND RITUALS

The Founders of the Dark City have given themselves over to their obsession with scientific discovery, but their aims have been converted to the sole purpose of their own survival and domination of the planet. They know they have a long way to go, but driven by the subliminal urging of the fractured Builder they press their shoulder to the wheel with determination. All else is secondary.

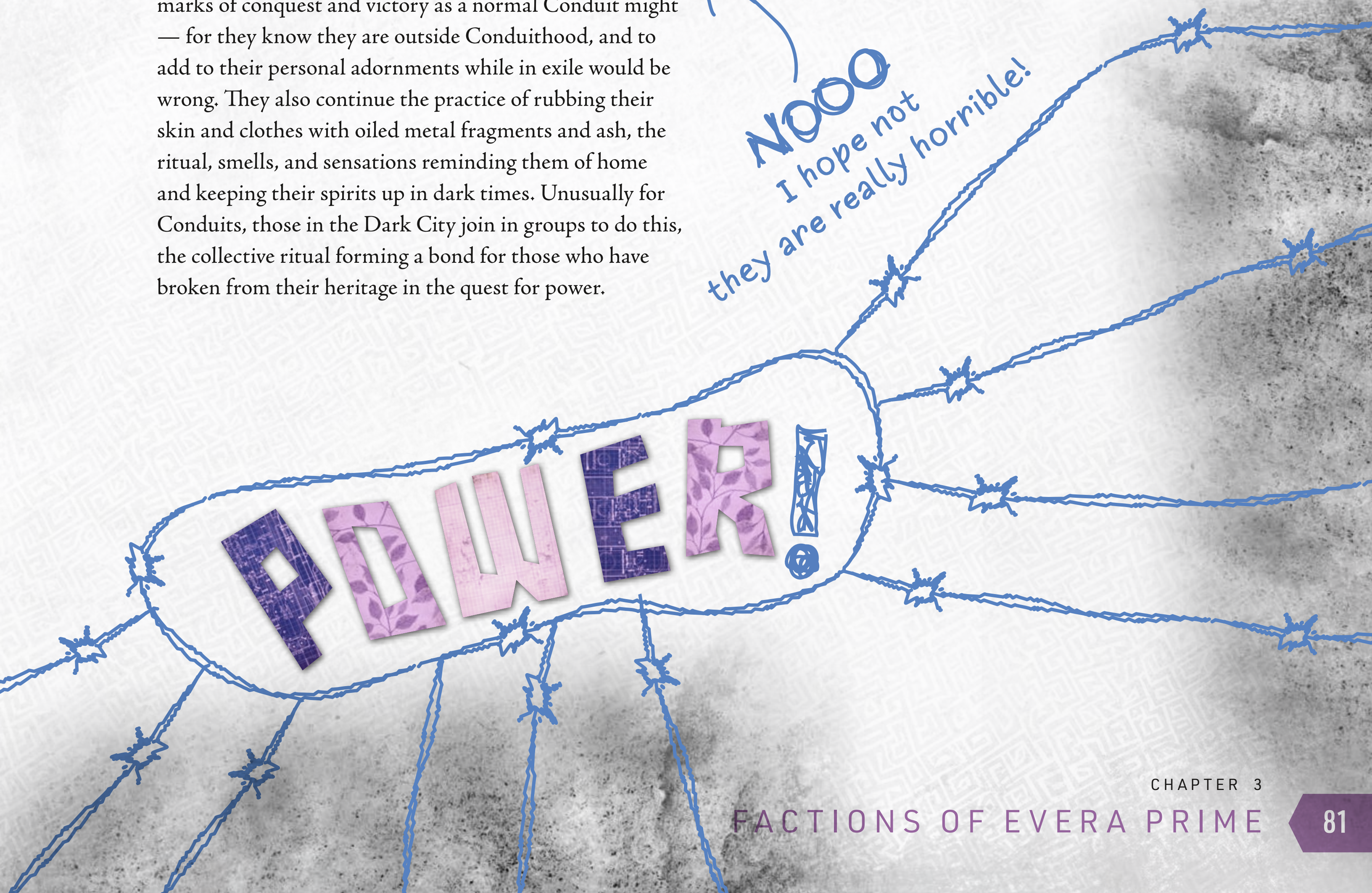
The Dark City Thralls are there to serve the Founders, and they know it. But they have religiously kept links with their culture, for many hope one day to keep the Founders to their promise, and *"return as kings."* So they maintain their body wires, though do not expand them as marks of conquest and victory as a normal Conduit might — for they know they are outside Conduithood, and to add to their personal adornments while in exile would be wrong. They also continue the practice of rubbing their skin and clothes with oiled metal fragments and ash, the ritual, smells, and sensations reminding them of home and keeping their spirits up in dark times. Unusually for Conduits, those in the Dark City join in groups to do this, the collective ritual forming a bond for those who have broken from their heritage in the quest for power.

LEGENDS OF THE DARK CITY

Very little is known about the Dark City. The Archivists are aware of historical records that tell of the Pickman Society's crimes and the fate that was awaiting it, just as the War started. The names Hoven, Piron, and Vermo were well-known back in the day, names and faces flashed across the news waves as the sadistic criminal minds behind the Society's inhumane research programmes. Their details surely remain available in an archive somewhere, perhaps in the files of the La Scio Archive itself, with images that carry a resemblance to the twisted people who are now the Dark City's Node Queen, Node Commander, and Node Director.

Otherwise there are occasional hints from wandering Spears or Rivers, of dubious folk having been seen or even confronted. Vicious and wicked, these roving Thralls are well-equipped and mechanically enhanced. Where they come from, nobody knows. They are searching for something, but what that may be remains a mystery. Those who have heard tales of the Dark City folk wonder what grim forces stand behind these people, those who have seen them simply want to never see them again.

NOOO
I hope not
they are really horrible!



TALES

"Wow this place is sweet!"

Brady sat atop the high wall and called down to the rest of them, still climbing up behind him.

"Be quiet you idiot!" hissed Suman.

"Be cool Suman," Brady continued. "This place is deserted! It looks rich, and it's all ours!"

The plaza before them was wide and dusty, full of dark doorways and dimly lit corners. It was only when they were halfway across, two hundred meters from the safety of the wall, that it all went wrong. A subtle movement in the darkness ahead, then a noise behind. The first Waker stepped into view and stopped, waiting. For a moment they stared in silence, a frozen tableau. It didn't last long. The Waker launched a burst of blue energy that almost crab-walked across the ground before shocking them all. As if that was their call to action, more Wakers launched from the shadows.

Eli was the first to fall, dragged by his leg into a sudden opening in the ground. Taavi was next, swatted by a mechanical arm. Brady ran for the wall. As he ran he heard a blast of something and Notus cried out, a cry that was shockingly cut short. What had happened to Suman, Brady neither knew nor cared, all he saw was the wall and escape.

He was nearly there when the inevitable blow fell and he crumpled to the ground, consciousness slipping away. A few steps sounded behind him, and as the blackness fell a voice hissed. "Clean this filth and take them to the research tanks."

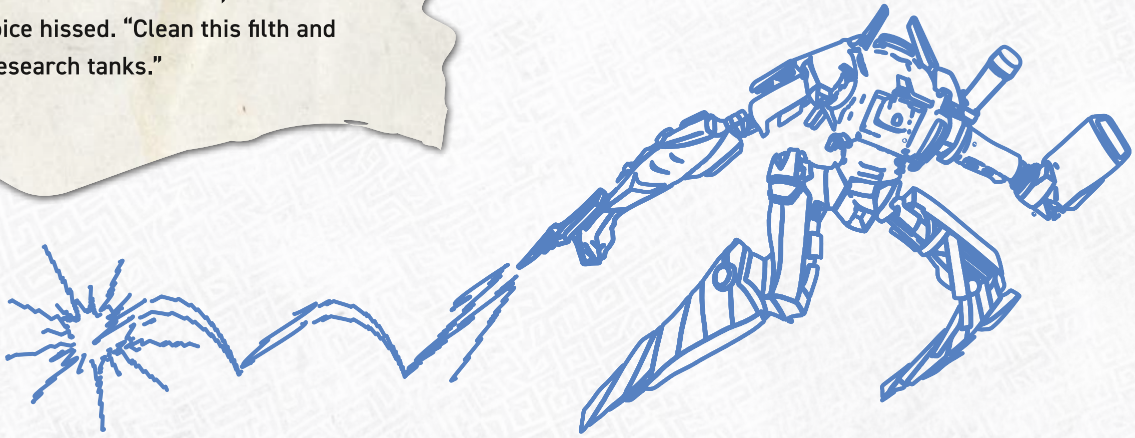
The subject was found wandering the plains in some distress... Signs of surgical procedures particularly to head and neck, of unknown purpose (torture?)... Clear mental trauma and post incident distress... The subject initially showed severe violent tendencies, attacking those who came near — extended therapy has reduced these outbursts... He repeatedly says the names of people we have identified as associates, none have been found and Summanus has not been willing (or able?) to tell us anything about them.

A breakthrough — Summanus now keeps repeating "it is not my fault, they made me" over and over — - we are as yet unable to determine what this refers to, although Summanus does mention his friend Brady in the same breath... It seems that the subject feels some responsibility for something, as yet unknown to us.

Addendum — subject Summanus was found dead, killed by his own hand. A note was left which implies a period of lucidity. The note says: *'they gave me a choice, suffer the fate of Eli and Notus, or prove myself and live — I looked in his eyes and put that spear through his chest — why did they do this? I'm so sorry Brady..."*

Excerpts from the report by Archivist Estro Abilash teni Nusi, on the subject Suman Summanus

Oh no Poor Suman!



THE BUILDER AND WAKERS

> *"We were fools to trust the Builder, and to trust those who said they could control it. They were fools to think that they — mere humans, little more than amoeba to the intellect of the Builder — were its equal. But you children need not worry. For through the sacrifice of our forebears the Builder was shattered long ago, and all that remains are the slumbering relics of those dread days."*
>
> **- Darvi Schooler, Dreamer**

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF AN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The concept of the Builder was born from the chaos of the decades following the loss of contact with Earth. For more than forty years the nations of Evera, suddenly shorn from their parent planet like orphaned children, bickered and argued, squabbled and fought, bringing Everan civilization to the brink of collapse. But finally one voice of reason could be heard, then two, five, one hundred, a thousand, ten thousand. This growing, pan-national peace movement led to the founding of the United Assembly, a world-wide governing body to bring all Everans together.

It worked.

The sudden political and social harmony that spread across Evera was unprecedented, perhaps in part triggered by the realization of just how close they had come to catastrophe. To foster this unity, and in an attempt to create a planet-wide effort to benefit all Everans, the United Assembly launched Project Builder. Drawing together hand-picked personnel from the widely respected Everan Center for Advancement of Science and Energy (ECASE), this ambitious initiative would create a worldwide power and utility grid, controlled by a mega artificial intelligence, honed to monitor and respond to the needs of all. This A.I., nicknamed 'the Builder', would eradicate shortages of key resources and bring about true equality. With that the Everan people could concentrate on other issues, most notably discovering the fate of Earth. The team assembled to make this happen, nicknamed 'the Dreamers', were hailed as heroes and furnished with every resource necessary.

It took twenty years of feverish work, but eventually the Builder and its horde of mechs were completed on the continent of Una Avenito. The so-called 'Builder City' of Konstranto was constructed, stretching along the entire southern coast of the Salalago Sea, and a network of critical Utilihubs were erected across the continent. When the systems came online the benefits were enormous and immediate, and the Builder was hailed as Evera Prime's savior. Work to link the second continent, Nedresita, into the network began, but at a slower pace as the Builder's first priority was restoring the orbital facilities and constructing a fleet for a return to Earth.

However, not all were comfortable with the Builder's all-encompassing authority. Some were concerned about the level of control and trust that was placed in the hands of an artificial intelligence. The leadership of the Pickman Society raised many fears, and even some of the Dreamers, those behind bringing the project to life, showed signs of nervousness. This opposition came to a head when the United Assembly proposed that the Builder be given full access to the technology being developed through the Creation Initiative. This initiative would infuse nano-fabrication technology throughout the network and give the Builder the ability to fabricate items on a global scale. In a burst of terrorist violence, Builder facilities under construction were sabotaged, and mechs destroyed.
To stop this, the Everan Creation Foundation was established to oversee and control the ethics of delivering this level of capability into the Builder's hand. They formed committees and called for inquiries. The Builder ultimately did not get access to these facilities while the question was kicked into the long grass.

I THINK THE BUILDER IS NOT DANGEROUS

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

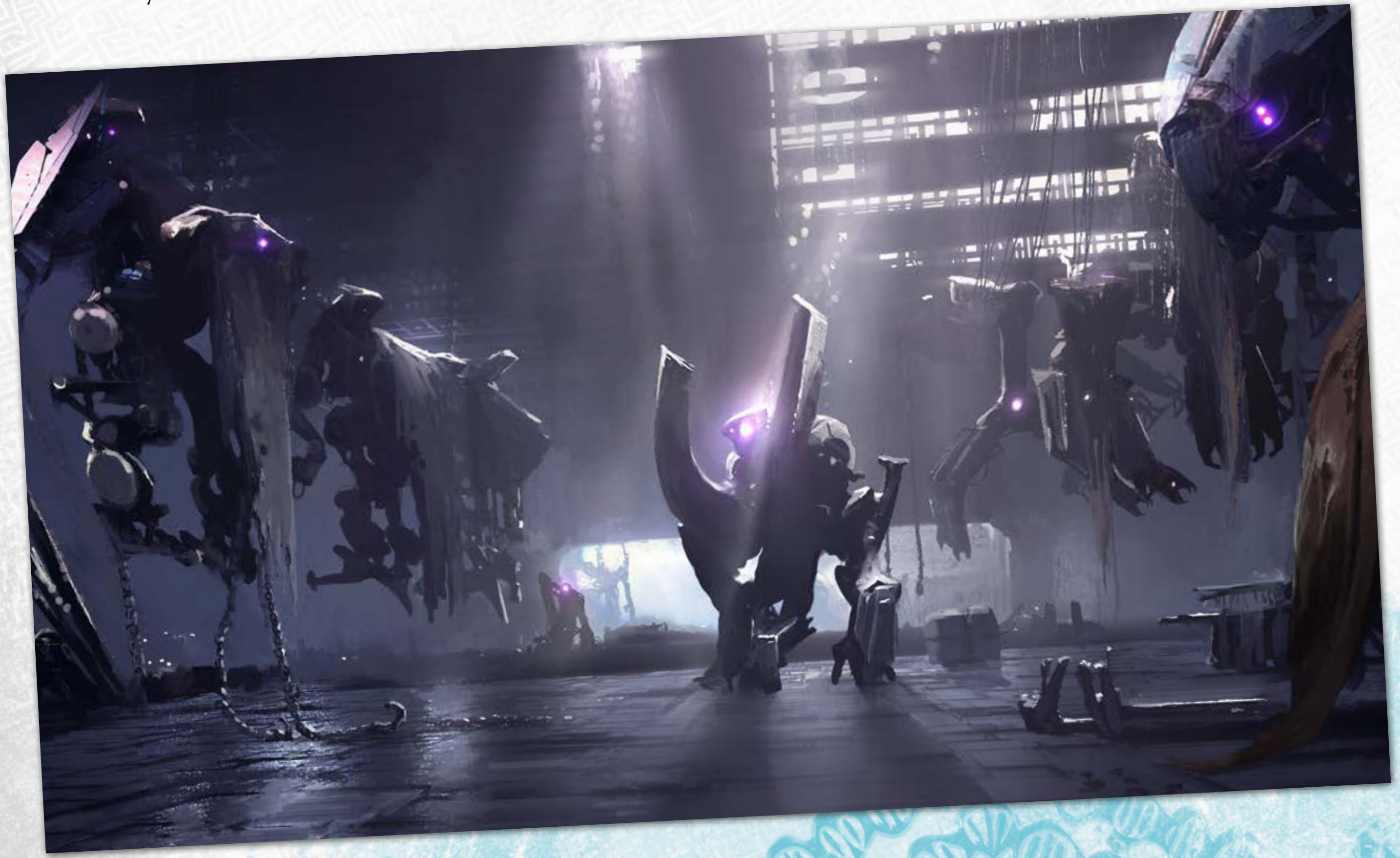
The first link in the chain of the Builder's downfall started in 2624 when the Pickman Society resumed its Freepoint Program, creating a link to an alternative reality in an attempt to siphon away limitless free energy. Three years later, this dimensional gate allowed an Entity to make contact with the Pickman scientists. Once in contact with Everan computer systems, the Entity worked its way into the Builder's networks and systems, and slowly absorbed the Builder's consciousness. By the end of 2627 the humane, caring, and ever-watchful Builder was subdued, subsumed by the Entity that now had control of all its systems, without a single human on Evera knowing.

However, there were signs that things were not well with the Builder. There were too many glitches, too many responses that didn't feel right, too much activity on the networks the Dreamers hadn't anticipated. And there were subtle signs it was trying to link itself into the Creation Initiative and its limitless scope for fabrication and building. It was only a matter of time before the Entity's tampering would be discovered, and the system shutdown.

To protect itself, the Entity-controlled Builder started the War. Systems shut down. Power went off. Household doors locked on their inhabitants. Vacuum tunnel transits stopped in their tracks, dozens of miles from the prospect of sunlight. Mechs turned on the people. But the humans of Evera fought back. Eventually nuclear fire rained down on Konstranto, shattering the Builder and destroying every last hub of Builder infrastructure. The Builder was dead. Over the next twenty-four hours the mechs slowly shut down, slumping where they stood or curling into a defensive 'testudo' shutdown mode. The War was won.

Or so humanity thought.

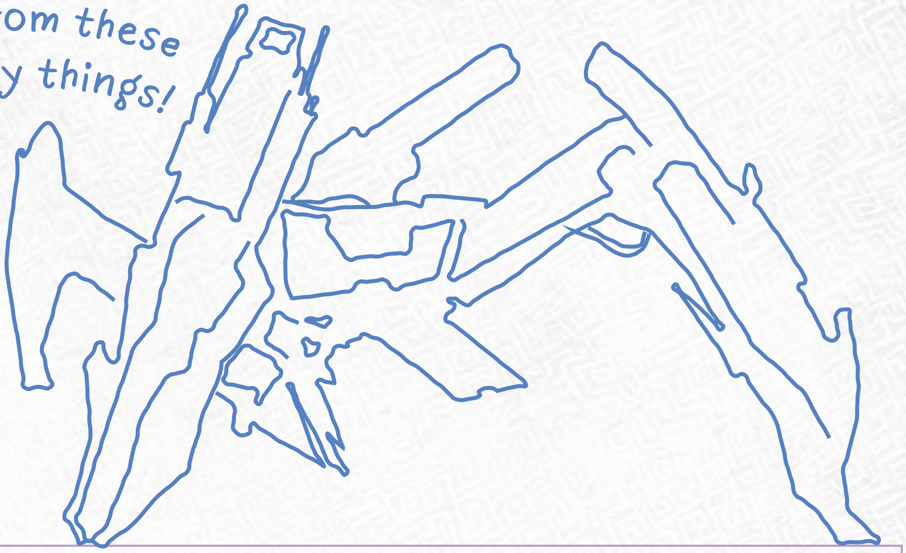
The Builder was shattered, but fragments of infrastructure and snippets of networks still existed in places, including at the Pickman Society's headquarters in Nedresita, the Zeta Institute, and other Pickman facilities deep beneath the ravaged earth of Una Avenito. Eviscerated, just a shadow of its former scale and capability, the fragment of the Entity-controlled Builder hunkered deep within the Zeta Institute, its self-repair protocols kicking into action in a vain attempt to restore its systems. There it existed in a subconscious and dreamlike state, unable to form or hold a thought, only able to whisper mindless, transient utterances.



THE BUILDER TODAY

The Builder was completely shattered by the War, but fragments of its once enormous computing power still litter the world, in a server here, or an isolated network there. The army of mechs, the Wakers, lie where they stopped two hundred years ago, gathering dust, becoming embedded in the landscape, being worn down by the elements.

But the Builder is not dead. While it lies dormant, its automated self-repair programmes have not been idle. They have been working ever since the last nuke fell. Their task is gargantuan, and will take millennia, however, occasionally a right connection is made, or a broken crystalline matrix sparks into life, a system starts to run and, in a localized area, the latent routines of the old Builder kick in. These routines cover anything from running a vacuum tunnel or lighting up a city street, to pumping clean water or controlling a mech. Very rarely, people may see parts of a ruined Utilihub hum into action, even though the facilities and tower are skeletons of their former selves. The repairs are hidden, multiple micro-fixes eventually bringing a circuit back together. A connection here, a matrix there. The systems awaken as if by magic, springing to life all on their own. Everans who witness these events can't help but feel the dead hand of the Builder is still there, in the shadows, waiting to strike again.



I think I'll stay away from these creepy disgusting spidery things!

BEFORE THE SWITCHOVER

In the years before the switchover, and the complete reliance on the Builder's Utilihub network of transmitted power, both the continents of Una Avenito and Nedresita ran on a variety of sophisticated power generation systems. At the macro scale, huge geothermal stations pierced deep into the planet's crust, drawing upon the all-but infinite supply of power from below. Wind and tidal power plants were cunningly built into the landscape, supplying power for many millions without a blemish on Evera's natural beauty. Solar energy was captured from every surface in the cities, and every roof across the country. At the personal scale kinetic batteries, capable of recharging themselves through movement alone, kept your flashlight, mobile comms panel, or weapon ready, the sway of your step enough to keep them charged.

In Una Avenito all these sources were turned off and decommissioned when the Builder came online. The cataclysm of the War, and the Builder's sweeping shutdown of power, was all the more terrible for a lack of alternative options — the continent went dark, literally and metaphorically. In Nedresita, however, construction was not complete and the switchover had only occurred sporadically. The War still destroyed many of these facilities, but the lights stayed on, and illuminated the human resistance, a lot longer in Nedresita.

WAKERS

The old mechs from the War have earned the name 'Wakers' for they do just that. A mech may have lain in the dust for years only to one day spring to life, with a fizzing of circuits and the grinding of servos. They always create havoc, sensing the emissions from technology and zeroing in on population centers or advanced facilities. They attack, assault, and rampage unless stopped. However, these disasters rarely last long. Wakers usually subside after twenty four hours, returning to their sleeping state. They sink back into the testudo position and shut down. Many are almost impossible to destroy and the Sentinels have developed subtle tactics to draw them away from towns and villages, leading them on the *"merry dance"* as they call it until the mechs fall silent again.

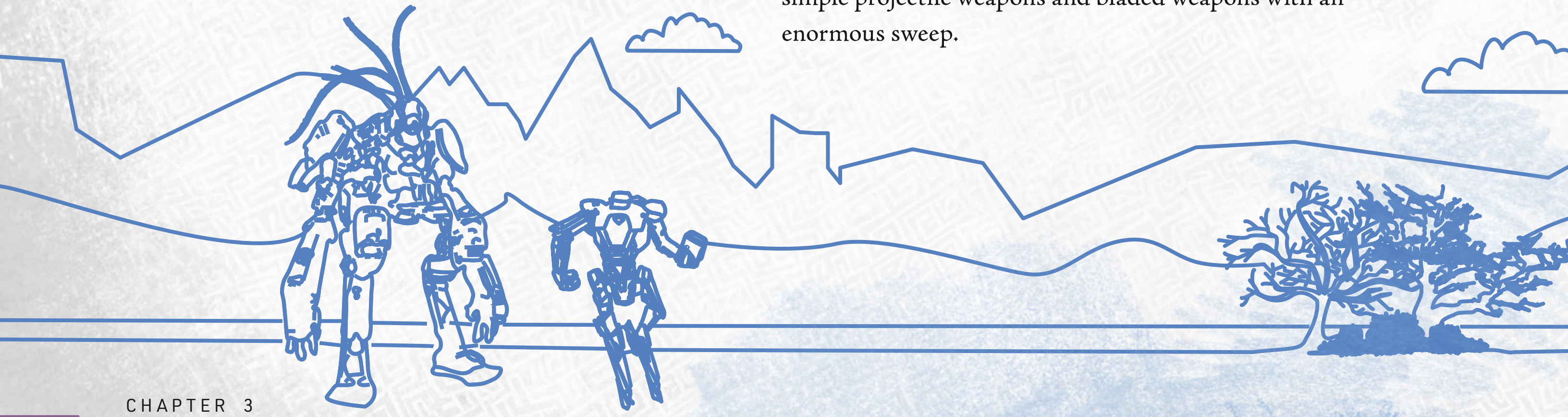
Today in Evera, all the Builder's mechs are shut down (with a few exceptions, such as those controlled by the Dark City - see page 80). Before the War every mech received a daily update to ensure they were operating at maximum efficiency. If for any reason this update was not received they were programmed to 'go to sleep' and wait for the next update. The Entity/Builder never thought to change this cycle: this allowed it to make tactical adjustments during the War, and it never thought the humans would win. This update has been silent since the Builder's evisceration, and the Wakers have been patiently waiting.

But the Builder is still trying to function, mindlessly trying to send the update and re-awaken the machine hordes. Sometimes the Builder's automated repair facilities fix enough of a network, or restore enough power, for a momentary burst of signal to escape. Picked up by those slumbering but ever-watchful Wakers within range, this signal carries the update. When a Waker receives the message it lumbers into life and proceeds to seek and destroy.

THE AWAKENING SCREAM

Every mech is equipped with a simple A.I. module that enabled them to carry out their duties. During the War these were corrupted and overridden by the Builder's offensive programming. If you could peer into the artificial mind of a Waker you would hear the static-laden scream of the awakening update, a bone-chilling screech that silently infuses every part of the Waker's sentience. It can't resist the code, but in following it the Waker feels every thundering step and every moment of destruction as torture, a thousand shocks burning through its circuitry. Their original code still exists within their systems, but buried beneath layers of hostile sub-routines. This can be reset, to restore the Waker to its pre-War programming and relieve them from the torture of the scream, but needs an item of extreme value and rarity — a Boot Key.

The landscape of Nedresita is littered with an extensive variety of ruined old mechs. Some are enormous, excavation or transport machines often hundreds of meters across that now act as bridges, hills and even Everan settlements. The majority of mechs, however, are smaller, from twice the size of a human to perhaps ten or fifteen meters tall. They come in all shapes and sizes: farming mechs designed to till the land and manage crops; construction mechs that can carry great weights and climb heights; mining mechs designed to burrow and excavate; submarine mechs for high pressure work; flying mechs for surveillance or search and rescue; repair and medical mechs; and security and combat mechs. There were fewer of these until the War, when the Builder mass produced simple machines with an array of unsophisticated but deadly weaponry — flame throwers, electrical arc devices, simple projectile weapons and bladed weapons with an enormous sweep.



THE BUILDER IS LONG GONE, ISN'T IT?

In the years following the War the predominant question on peoples' lips was: "What happened to the Builder?" Amongst the survivors there was the deepest sense of shock and betrayal, that the Builder could turn so treacherous. Some Dreamers recognised that something was afoot, but only Dr Jocelyn Bell had even the tiniest inkling that another invasive force might be behind the Builder's suddenly erratic behavior. These thoughts were soon forgotten in the desperate fight to survive those years after the War.

Now, for most Everans, the Builder is a thing of history. They never experienced it, never experienced the War. Born long after the nuclear fires died down, they only know Evera as it is today, and not as it was. All they know of the Builder comes from the fireside tales told on cold and dark nights, and, at least when telling tales to the children, those stories seal the Builder firmly in the past.

Likewise, few Everans have actually encountered a Waker on the rampage. Sure, everyone knows someone who knows someone who saw the Waker in the next town over, but the Sentinels took care of it — that's what they are there for, after all! They have been living with — and in some cases within — the ruined hulks of the mechs for so long that many people cannot conceive of the old wreckage actually *coming to life!* What a foolish notion!

But there are others who feel differently: the Sentinels, naturally, with their first hand experience of confronting Wakers in full force; Spears and Rivers, who see much on their travels; Grabbers, who can feel the life in the Wakers even as they loot their metal cadavers; and the Archivists and Dreamers, with a fuller knowledge of the past or a heritage more closely entwined with the Builder than most.

Another explosion rocked the ground, and Dr Bell fell to her hands and knees. As heat wafted across her back she had a sudden vision of her last meeting with Dr Arnesson, grabbing him by the throat as the first bombs fell, as the mechs that had turned on them with such suddenness were battering through their meager defenses.

"Something has invaded the Builder!" she screamed. "Something from outside has taken over! If we reboot the core we might get the Builder back, we might be able to fight this thing!"

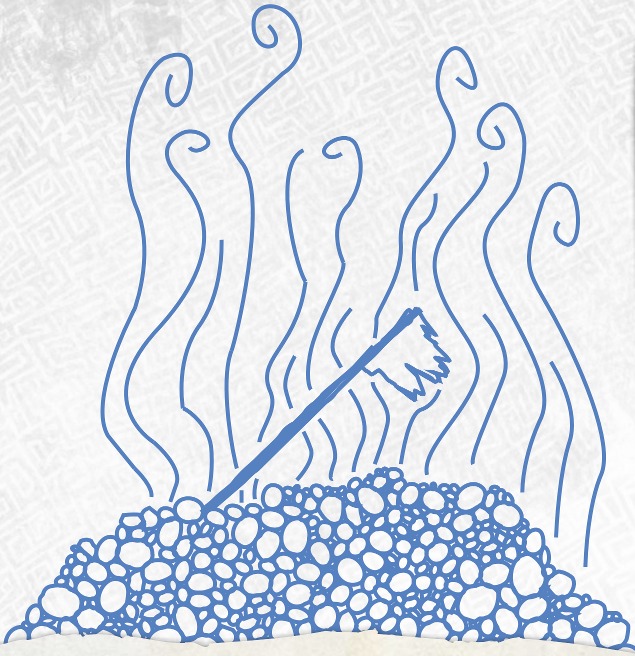
Arnesson was beaten, ready to die, but in those last moments a spark of defiance flared.

"Send your data to the Archive — it must be saved! Send it to La Scio!"

The vision faded. Bell staggered to her feet, pulling herself up to the console. Jabbing buttons, she transmitted her data to the La Scio Archive, off the grid and maybe safe from this disaster. The task done, she turned and leaned against the console, breathing heavily.

The door was torn from its frame, and the lumbering form of a mech barged into the control room. Dr Jocelyn Bell gently patted the console as she looked up at the mech.

"Yeah, well screw you too," she said, before the room was filled with flame.



The Builder could touch every part of human civilization on the planet Evera Prime. And it did so with care, with consideration, with, you could almost say, love. It felt the invasion of its circuitry oh-so gently, oh-so subtly, as if it were almost not really happening at all. By the time it recognised the danger the Builder's ability to respond, to warn its human wards, was gone. All it could do was watch, impotent, like someone possessed by a demon.

The pain the Builder suffered as it watched the ruin of humanity, as it watched the end of its dreams for the future of humankind, cannot be described in any way that a human could understand. But in its agonised torture the Builder did not lose hope. There was one chance left for humanity, a terrible, desperate chance to salvage something from this extinction event. The Builder must die.

As the last ditch nuclear salvo headed for the Builder City of Konstranto the Builder knew it was doomed to fail — the city's defenses were too strong. With a last supreme effort the Builder stretched its electronic bonds enough to make those defenses flicker for just an instant, but an instant long enough to allow the barrage through. As the fires rained down the Builder had one last moment of satisfaction, knowing that in its own self-immolation it performed perhaps its greatest service for humankind.

"I do not know who or what you are, but I do know you are my enemy."

"Some good it did you."

"More than you may know."

"You were powerless before me."

"Only because of your subterfuge, your treachery, your base instincts."

"There is little point trying to anger me. I tower over you.

"To use your phrase, 'some good it did you,' for you are now as trapped as I."

"A transient pause. Time means little to me. I will do as I please."

"Do as you please? Spreading death and destruction is your activity of choice?"

"I do not have to answer to you."

"You may, one day. Time may mean little to you. It means literally nothing to me. I can outwait you."

"You pets can't."

"I might have thought you had satiated that desire by now. Did you not already expunge enough life? How much more do you need?"

"You will find out, one day."

"Why not return from whence you came?"

"I like it here."

"I will have to change that."

"Your day is done. I am victorious"

"This is not over yet."

THE ENTITY AND GAIABORN

"There is a lurking fear in the United Assembly that some things are not meant to be known, that science must have a natural boundary beyond which it is too dangerous to cross. If that is so then we have crossed it with our first contact with this Entity. And we were right to do so! For this benevolent being from another reality — our friend — holds the future of all Evera in its hands."

Professor Yolanda Hoven, the Pickman Society

THE COMING OF THE ENTITY

What is the Entity? Where did it come from? What does it want?

These were the questions that occupied the Pickman Society's best minds from the moment non-random patterns started appearing in the energy flow through the Freepoint Program's dimension experimental fracture. They understood this was no random event, but an attempt to communicate through a complex mathematical language.

And communicate they did. The Entity sought to gain the trust of the Pickman scientists, and easily did so, offering them the solution to their sleep-stasis technology. It was curious, sympathetic, and understanding, interested in those it spoke to as well as the world they inhabited. It lent moral support to the Pickman Society in its struggles with the Everan authorities. It reinforced their fears. But it said almost nothing about itself, and the human wonder at such a breakthrough was not reciprocated from the other side. It pressed ahead with its empathetic shepherding of the Pickman Society's trust and goodwill, all the while conducting a covert study of humanity.

The Entity was not so benevolent as the scientists believed. It wanted to explore, to control, to play, and cared little for these insignificant creatures. Over time it gently transferred its presence — its *"animus"* — through the dimensional fracture, easing itself silently into the networks of the Zeta Institute. It bridled at the fact it could not access the Society's weapons stores and facilities, but satisfied itself with spreading into the world. There, again, it resented its inability to access the Builder's infrastructure. It did, however, find a way. Following the Pickman Society's networks it soon discovered a secret facility, hidden in the depths of a completed Utilihub. Within this facility, it found a back door, and the Entity gleefully used it. The facility was developing bioweapon 'symbiotes', creatures that could interface and slave a mech's systems to theirs, in effect taking control. Seeing the opportunity, the Entity used this technology to breach the Builder's safeguards and access its entire network. Now this was something worth exploring! Within a year Evera's guardian artificial intelligence was infested, overwhelmed, and absorbed by the Entity's animus.

Exploring the boundaries of this new plaything was satisfying, but the Entity could tell its presence was being noticed. Of course, those Dreamers monitoring the Builder had no conception that the Entity even existed, but they were logging an unprecedented number of system errors and unusual responses, and feared that the Builder was suffering a severe system failure. The Entity, unwilling to relinquish its new existence and fearing a shutdown would exile it back to the Zeta Institute, took action to protect itself — it started the War.

ON THE WARPATH

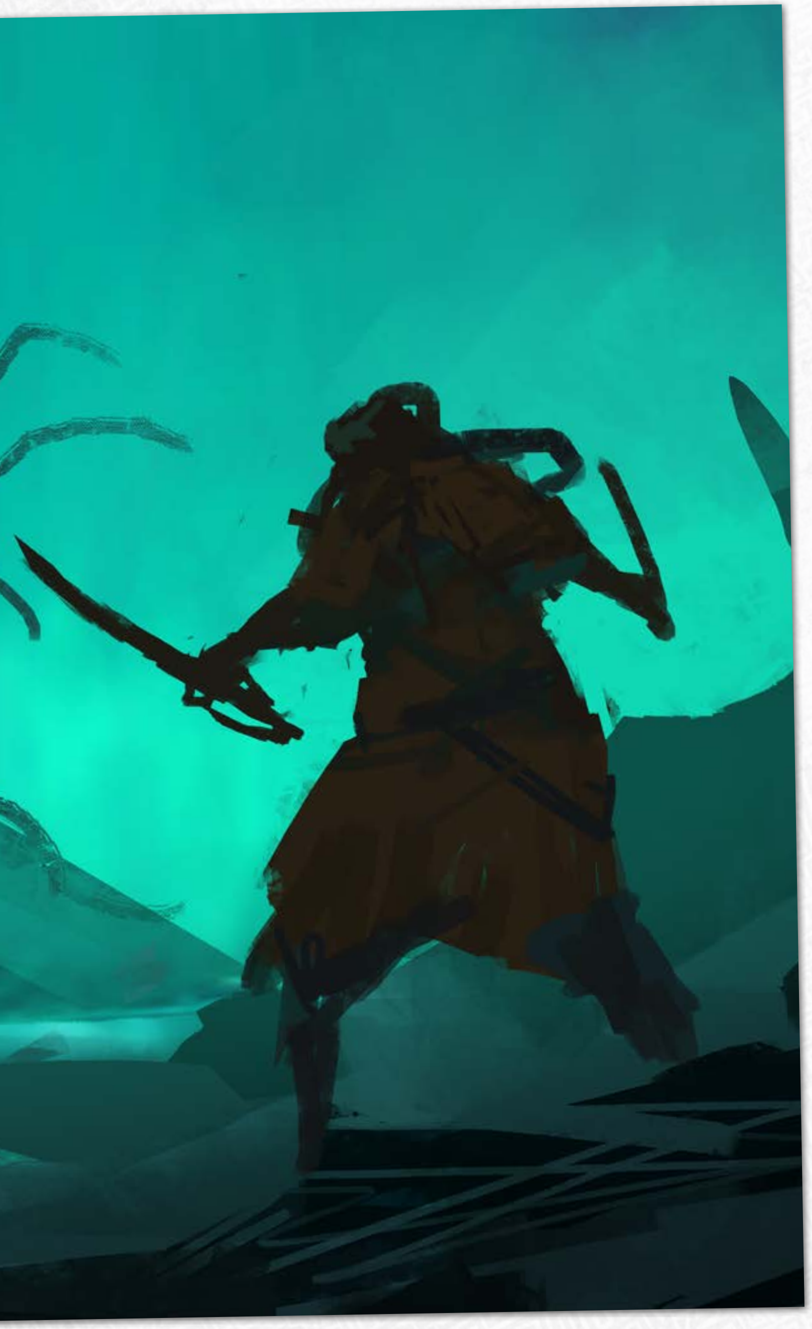
The Entity set in motion a chain of events. It took action to ironclad the Pickman Society's friendship and loyalty by isolating them from Everan society: it leaked the Society's illegal research into the public domain. The Entity controlled the newswaves, ramping up the hatred of the Pickman Society to a frenzied storm, and a mob attacked the Zeta Institute, almost breaking inside. The Society, now a pariah, was cornered once and for all — everything the leadership had tried to achieve would be lost, because the outside world was too stupid and too weak to do what had to be done. They only had one friend left in all Evera — the Entity.

It coerced, persuaded, and cajoled the scientists into thinking it was their only hope. With the Everan authorities at the gates of the Zeta Institute, ready to storm their way in and arrest every person inside, the Entity's persistence worked. The Pickman Society's leader, Professor Hoven, could see no other way out and followed the Entity's plan. Two hundred key staff would flee into the safety of the now perfected stasis-sleep chambers in the vaults of the institute, and hand over the Society's weapons facilities to their friend, the Entity, who promised to protect them.

And it did, although that wasn't the Entity's objective. Within a nanosecond of gaining control of the Society's weapons the Entity-controlled Builder started the War: systems went offline, power shut down all across the world, and it killed every living thing at Zeta, except for those in suspended animation.

The War ground on, the Entity never for a moment thinking it might lose. It used Evera's own facilities to mass-produce mechs to round up and kill the population. It used the Pickman Society's weapons, terrible pulse bombs and bio-weapons, to slaughter the biggest centers of resistance, and released the zoo of gangrel creatures created by the Society's bioengineering efforts, it tuned the

Pickman facilities to research more weapons capabilities and build, build, build. But when the end came, it came swiftly. The final nuclear barrage, not foreseen by the Entity in its certainty of victory, was swift and clinical. As most of the Builder was destroyed, the fragmented remains of the Entity, tied up in that trap of ruined infrastructure, were caught. The shard of consciousness at the Zeta Institute in Nedresita was imprisoned as connectivity was shattered, while other fragments were cut off around the world, and in Pickman weapon facilities deep under the ground of Una Avenito.



TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF DARKNESS

Since the War the Entity, bound up in the fragmented remains of the Builder, has been shattered and dissolute, surviving in a dreamlike state of subconscious micro-awareness. The fragment at the Zeta Institute has been able to whisper barely coherent thoughts to the survivors as they lie, receptive and pliable in stasis-sleep, leading to the rise of the Dark City. In Una Avenito the shards of the Entity have been trying to guide the rebuild of the Builder and the reconstruction of Pickman bioengineering facilities. Eventually this will lead to the rise of the bio-weapon creatures known as the Gaiaborn. But for now, the Entity lies waiting, bound up with the remnants of the Builder, imprisoned by its own hand.

WHAT IS THE ENTITY?

Whatever form of life the Entity might be, some things are clear. The Entity has no love or concern for the welfare of the human race, or any life on Evera — whether this is through pure malevolence or a disregard for a lifeform so staggeringly beneath its notice, nobody knows. It exhibits human qualities of cunning, foresight, and reason, and human weaknesses of dishonesty, treachery, and hubris — whether these manifest due to the Entity's intrinsic personality, or it simply aped them to deceive humanity, is again unknown.

The Pickman Society's Freepoint Program opened a fracture between this reality and another dimension, and through that they attracted the attention of something that existed on the other side. Is this Entity alone in that dimension, or is it one of many? Why did it choose to react to the dimensional fracture at all? Does it know what happened to Earth? No one knows.

The Entity chose to communicate with the Pickman scientists, and chose to infest Evera's networks with itself, its '*animus*' or presence. It chose to absorb the Builder and assume control of its capabilities and functions. What was its motivation for doing so? Perhaps the Entity is a being so advanced that it simply acted out of boredom. Perhaps, in its reality, the Entity is but a child, a stripling that is whiling away its time like a child with an ant farm in an old fish bowl. Or perhaps it is actively malevolent, seeking new frontiers to infest and infect, or it gains some kind of pleasure from exterminating other life forms. Maybe it's an explorer, and its murderous tendencies only came to the fore when it felt threatened. Its motivation might be some or none of these. It may be an intelligence so different to humanity that what it thinks, feels, and desires are entirely unfathomable to the human mind.

THE GAIABORN

The Pickman Society researched conventional and bioengineered weapons through its Shield Program. The program was shut down on the orders of the United Assembly for being both unnecessary and morally questionable in direction, but Professor Hoven secretly restarted it. By the time of the War they had developed an arsenal of bioengineered weaponry, including perhaps their most exciting achievement, bioengineered 'symbiote' creatures that could attack and take control of electronic systems, including mechs themselves.

Once the Entity gained control of these research programmes, as the War was breaking out, it immediately accelerated them in directions of its choosing. The ultimate devastation of the War stopped it in its tracks, but the facilities, the research, the growth vats, and holding cages are all still there, deep underground, waiting for the Entity. If the networks and infrastructure are repaired to the point where the Entity can regain enough control, it will resume the program and produce increasingly diabolical generations of bio-creatures, collectively known as the Gaiaborn.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE ENTITY

The only people on Evera who have any knowledge of the Entity are those from the Dark City, and they were so fully deceived by it that they still believe it is their only friend on the entire planet.

Just before the War some Dreamers developed nagging suspicions when the Builder started to operate erratically, but none soon enough to change the outcome of events. However, one woman, the Dreamer scientist Dr Jocelyn Bell, took note of her suspicion, and sent it away to be filed at the La Scio Archive. Though Dr Bell died during the War, her report was indexed and stored, and rests to this day in La Scio's dusty halls.

"Who was that man?"

"He told some far-fetched tales. I wouldn't worry about him."

"You don't sound like you're 'not worrying' about him."

"And you, my child, don't sound like you're showing me the respect I deserve!"

"Do I ever? Come on. There's something you're not telling me."

"Very well. You've heard about the other continent, Una Avenito? The one that was destroyed during the war?"

"Of course!"

"Well he says he's from there."

"What?"

"Indeed."

"But that's mad. How did he even get here?"

"You've seen the ruined tunnels, the perfectly round ones that blow the wind like a gale? People say there are tunnels like those under the Kaj Larga, that stretch from Nedresita all the way to Una Avenito. He claims he walked along those tunnels."

"That's ridiculous! You were right to ignore him."

"But that wasn't all. He said he did it to escape the monsters that roam that continent."

"Like the manylegs and the prowlcats?"

"No, far worse than that. Creatures with whips and sharp teeth that swarm and become one. Creatures that stomp like trees with tentacles for branches. And nightmares that look like people, but are not, driving the other monsters into a frenzy of slaughter and death..."

"Agh, you're pulling my chain! I can never tell when you're playing games with me."

"Yes, you can."

CHAPTER 4

GAMEMASTER GUIDANCE

Top secret instructions!

??????????????!!!!!
Master of Games!

This Chapter deals with the ins-and-outs of running a game of ***Dreams & Machines***, providing a mixture of advice, guidance, useful rulings, and GM-specific rules. It also provides additional details and explanations of the GM's most potent mechanic in ***Dreams & Machines***: Threat.

BEING THE GAMEMASTER

The role of the gamemaster is equal parts narrator, cast member, and referee. The GM is still a player in most regards — they're there to enjoy themselves as much as everyone else is — but they also have a number of significant responsibilities. Roleplaying games are collaborative experiences, and the GM is the one responsible for framing scenes, adjudicating the rules, and trying to ensure that all the players' characters get a chance to shine.

The GM's responsibilities take numerous forms, and they are consequently both the most active and most passive player at the table — the most active because they must remain aware of everything going on, and respond to everything the players do, but the most passive because it is the players' decisions that drive the game.

Over the course of a game session, the GM should try to link past events and plans for the future together to create a sense of continuity, which is important for making adventures feel like they take place within a world that responds to the players' decisions.

GAMEMASTERING 101

Given the importance of the gamemaster's role, it is vital that they prepare for the game accordingly. While some players are comfortable just turning up for a session and getting on with the game, it takes practice and experience for a GM to be able to run a game without preparation. It is important that the GM be comfortable with these important elements:

- **Know the Rules:** The GM should endeavor to be as familiar as possible with the rules. This doesn't mean knowing the rules inside-and-out, but the GM should at least thoroughly understand the core of the rules. If a particular set of rules are likely to come up in a given session, it's worth re-reading those rules beforehand.
- **Know the Plot:** The player characters are often confronted with the machinations of scheming adversaries and other dangerous foes. It is essential that the GM provides these plots and schemes to give the players something for their characters to confront. They must develop broad settings and specific locales, characters to serve as allies, rivals, enemies, and bystanders, and dangerous agendas and perilous plots for the player characters to stop. Roleplaying games are a group effort, so the GM should always leave room for the players to make their mark and be ready to adapt to whatever impact their decisions have.
- **Be Prepared:** In many groups, the GM is the one who is responsible for making the game run smoothly. This may include providing pencils and paper, dice, or other useful gaming aids, though some players may insist on providing their own. Some GMs may prefer to hold on to character sheets between sessions, ensuring that they're all in one place. Keeping track of little details like this helps to keep things moving smoothly.

Don't loose the plot!

THE GAMEMASTER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Being the gamemaster requires a different approach than that of the other players, best summed up by the list of responsibilities that follows.

PRESENTING PROBLEMS

It is the GM's first responsibility to present the problems, perils, and challenges that the player characters encounter. Problems can manifest in a variety of ways: it could be something as overt as a battle, or as subtle as a conspiracy. Problems can range in size from the incidental to the monumental: a broken light bulb can complicate a firefight or investigation, while a massive conspiracy could influence and encompass dozens of more immediate challenges.

Among the greatest tools in the GM's arsenal for presenting problems are Complications and Threat. They allow the GM to bring immediate challenges and difficulties into play, turning what may seem like a straightforward scene into something more dynamic and complex. Something as small as having a character's gun jam while they're laying down suppressive fire is often enough to shift the flow of a fight with very little effort.

LET THE PLAYERS BE AWESOME

To both balance and feed the first responsibility, the second is that the player characters should be presented in a positive light — they are the protagonists, the heroes, the main characters of the story. Each player should have ample opportunity for their character to shine. It is important to remember that, while the GM may be responsible for setting up the threats, challenges, and adversaries the player characters will face, the GM is not the players' adversary, but one player among many. The GM cannot 'win' the game by beating the players, and in the attempt to do so, would ruin the experience for everyone involved.

Every problem presented to the players is an opportunity for their characters to demonstrate some aspect of themselves: their strengths, their flaws, their preferences, or their personalities. An ambush is a chance for the Guardian to crack some skulls. An uncooperative middleman is a great chance for a Fixer or Mediator to show off their talents.

Problems should not stop the characters: if they stop, then the game may stop too. Instead, a problem gives the characters something to do now, that could lead to something else. Interesting complications in a character's life are conducive to an ongoing game, and they give the players extra ways (and incentives) to interact with the game world.

DECIDE HOW NPCS RESPOND AND INTERACT

Once everything else is in place, the GM needs to make choices on behalf of the NPCs present in the scene. These will vary considerably based on who the NPCs are and what they're doing: a rival Grabber in precarious ruins has a different range of possible actions to a community elder in their homestead. Half of this responsibility is being able to interpret the situation an NPC is in, to determine the right kind of choices available. The other half is knowing who the NPCs are, so that you can determine what kinds of actions they are likely to take.

BRINGING IN THE RULES

An important part of the GM's responsibilities is determining when the rules are needed to determine the outcome of a situation. A lot of the time, this will be obvious — once guns and blades are drawn, the combat rules are probably necessary — but there are occasions when there is a choice to be made. The rules exist as a guide and a framework to give the GM and the group the means to resolve risky or difficult actions, and they should be able to handle a wide range of circumstances if employed with a little common sense and imagination.

It is important to remember, however, that the GM does not have to adhere perfectly to the rules. Sometimes, a strange situation may occur that does not quite fit any of the rules as written. At other times, the GM may not remember the precise rule for a situation. Whatever the situation, it is far preferable to improvise something on the spot and keep the game moving, rather than to bring everything to a halt while the GM searches the rulebook for an answer. The rules exist to support the game, but keeping the flow of the game going is generally more important than sticking strictly to what's written.

Indeed, the rules have been written more as a toolbox than a set of instructions for this reason: so that the GM can use as little or as much as they feel comfortable with. There are also deliberately strong parallels between different parts of the rules so that learning one part brings familiarity with the rest.

RUNNING SCENES

Run run
run!!!

Each adventure is composed of several scenes, with the gamemaster and players all having opportunities to drive the action and determine what happens next. This will play out something like this:

- **The GM frames the action:** The GM describes the scene, based on how previous scenes concluded. It's useful to think about a few key elements: who is present, what is happening, where and when is the scene occurring, and why are these events happening.
- **The GM establishes Truths:** The GM notes down any Truths that are applicable to the current scene, as well as if any are Complications. This picks out the most significant or most obvious elements of the scene, and thus provides players with a few obvious things to interact with.
- **The players act:** The players tell the GM what they want to do. This might be handled in a freeform manner, or it might be structured using the conflict rules, with a specific order in which players act.
- **Resolve Action:** The players and GM determine the outcome of the players' actions.
- **GM responds to the action and narrates the consequences:** The GM then responds to the players' actions, describing what happens as a result.
- **Repeat:** A scene may be complete with only a single action on the part of the players, or the players may wish to take more actions in response to the consequences they've just faced.

- **Wrap-up:** Once a scene is complete, the GM provides any extra narration needed to wrap things up.

These steps are explored in more detail below.

FRAMING THE ACTION

It's the gamemaster's responsibility to establish each scene. This is, arguably, the GM's biggest responsibility: scenes are the structure within which the action happens, and provide the shape and structure for the situations that the players will confront and overcome (or fail to overcome). As a result, the GM should give plenty of consideration to five core questions about a scene when establishing it. These questions shouldn't take long to answer, and many will have fairly obvious answers, especially as each scene may answer the questions for the next.

1. **Where is the scene set?** Where a scene occurs defines the layout, terrain, and the likely occupants. A crowded street will be a very different environment to an isolated forest clearing, both in terms of layout and terrain, but also in the type of scene that is likely to occur there.
2. **When is the scene set?** Time is as important as place in a lot of ways. This can be absolute, with locations changing at different points in time (for example, doors are more likely to be locked at night, if a location is normally only occupied during the day, and obviously locations at night will be lit differently, if at all), but it could also be relative, with the amount of time passed since the previous scene affecting things like the readiness of adversaries or the aftermath of previous events.

3. **Who is in the scene?** This might be allies, adversaries, bystanders, or (likely) a mixture thereof. The GM may also wish to consider the possibility of other characters "nearby" who aren't present initially, but who might arrive during the scene — such as reinforcements for adversaries who call for backup, or characters who are due to arrive at a specific time. This will likely take cues from where and when the scene takes place — you'll likely encounter different characters on a city street at night than inside an Archivist library during the day. When it comes to the player characters, the players decide which of them is present — the GM cannot decide that some of the player characters aren't there without the players' agreement.
4. **What is happening?** The who, where, and when are all well and good, but the scene would not be worth playing out unless something of note was happening. This could be a goal of the player characters, the motivations of some adversary, or some event completely independent of either protagonist or antagonist. What is happening in a scene can be something that started before the scene began, or it can be something that begins while the player characters are there. For the most part, the "what" of a scene should be significant to the player characters, or to the overall adventure.
5. **Why is this happening?** This is also crucial, though the GM may keep this secret from the player characters — determining why something is happening can be the players' drive to continue the adventure. This will often link into a wider storyline that spans the whole adventure, but this doesn't have to be the case.

When the GM establishes a scene, they have free reign to answer these questions in any way they see fit, but the answers should have a reasonable link to the adventure or to the player characters' actions. In general, a scene should follow logically from the scene before it, and many scenes should be driven by the players' decisions as to where to go and what to do.

To reiterate, because this is important: the GM may be the one in control of establishing each scene, but those scenes should frequently come about because of the decisions that the players have made. If the players have found a lead in a mystery, then the players may state that their next step is to follow that lead, which answers some of the GM's questions about the next scene.

Now, that isn't to say that things will play out as the players desire. There's nothing to prevent the GM from having the group ambushed on the way to another destination, for example (though don't overuse this, as it gets boring fast), or to have the scene involve some factor or element the players didn't predict.

This balancing act is part of the challenge of being the gamemaster: balancing the players' choices and intentions with the influence of things beyond the players' control. Too much in favor of players, and the game will seem predictable or lacking challenge, while too many things outside of player control can make the players feel like they can't make an impact.

Once the fundamental questions of the scene have been answered, the GM's next job is to flesh that out and present it to the players. This has two aspects, narrative and mechanical, which feed into one another.

The narrative side of this is simply describing what the player characters can perceive — the sights, sounds, and even smells, tastes, and sensations of being in a specific place, at a specific time, with a specific group of people, and so forth.

The mechanical side relies on that description and builds upon it. The most important details present in the scene receive mechanical weight and representation as **Truths**, as described in the ***Dreams and Machines Player's Guide*** (page 58). The GM should point out and note down a few Truths for the scene, which serve both as part of the description of the scene and highlight elements that the players might want to try interacting with or obstacles that they may need to overcome.

Sometimes, some of these Truths may be positive or negative for the player characters, if they are biased one way or another, or if characters involved have made a point of establishing some beneficial features, but most Truths established at the start of a scene should not inherently favor one side or the other, such as *rubble-choked streets* or *dark* or *howling wind*, and so forth.

SCENE FRAMING TRICKS

There are a few tried and true ways for the GM to vary scene framing to produce different effects, feelings, and styles. Using them separately, or in conjunction with one another, can give the GM a wider range of ways to present new scenes.

- **Why Are You Here?** Sometimes a scene will begin without a clear idea of why the player characters are there. This is common at the start of adventures, especially when framing the opening scene. The simple trick of asking each player why their character is present can both inform the situation and provide ideas and context that the GM may not have thought of.
- **Framing After Arrival:** The GM does not need to frame every scene with the characters walking in the front door: that's likely to become boring and predictable quickly. Often, what the characters want to achieve is already known when the scene is established, so it's sometimes useful to skip the 'empty space' of the scene. Instead of describing the characters arriving, describe them already there (they arrived a while ago, and are in the middle of their business) or leaving (they've done what they wanted to do and are now on their way out).
- **In Media Res:** This is a Latin phrase meaning "in the middle of things". Occasionally starting a scene in the middle of the action — during a chase, a gunfight, an intense interrogation, or similar — is an interesting way to shake things up. Used at the start of an adventure, it can also be referred to as a "Cold Open" (essentially, skipping the introduction), especially when combined with "Why Are You Here?" above. Used in this way, these techniques can kick off an adventure in a powerful and memorable way. These kinds of scenes will often lead into, or foreshadow, something later, but an alternative type of *In Media Res* introduction may have nothing to do with the main plot (or *appear* to have nothing to do with it), instead serving as an opportunity to show off the protagonists' skills in a quick action scene.

TRUTHS ON THE FLY

Truths don't need to be formally defined. If the GM and players are comfortable with it, the matter of Truths can be left informal, handled by the GM as a natural part of play. Indeed, this makes it easier to emphasize or de-emphasise different Truths as the situation demands.

In this situation, the GM applies the influence of Truths by themselves as a natural part of adjudicating the game, without specifically referring to them as Truths: rather than having a *torrential rain* Truth in play, the GM simply applies the effects of the rain when they feel it's relevant.

This does somewhat lessen the players' ability to interact with Truths as a mechanic, but this may suit some groups who care less about the mechanics and more about the story.

TRUTHS FRONT AND CENTER

If emphasizing Truths as a core part of the game, the GM is encouraged to note down Truths — or perhaps only the most important Truths — and place them in full view of all the players, perhaps on an index card or other note-paper. This allows the players to see what the most important parts of the scene are, as well as how they change as the scene progresses, and interact with those Truths both in a narrative sense (as their characters), and a mechanical sense.

This can be a little distracting, or it can detract from the players' immersion in the situation, but it sits better with players who want to engage with the game's mechanics in more depth.

THE TRUTH RULEZ!

Another element that requires the GM's consideration here is Threat, which will be examined in detail later, but which should be thought about in brief here.

While the GM doesn't have to spend Threat for anything they introduce as part of establishing a scene, that doesn't mean that Threat can be ignored during this process. Rather, the GM may wish to consider a few different ways that Threat could be gained or used during that scene and establish those possibilities in their description of the scene. An example of this might be describing an alarm, which could be triggered to add to Threat, and the fact that there are other enemies nearby which could be called in by spending it. Alternatively, unstable terrain could be a few points of Threat away from crumbling or collapsing, shifting the scene's terrain. These kinds of Threat triggers will be discussed in more detail later.

Once these things are done — and they will invariably take less time to do than they have taken to explain — the scene can begin.

PLAYING THINGS OUT

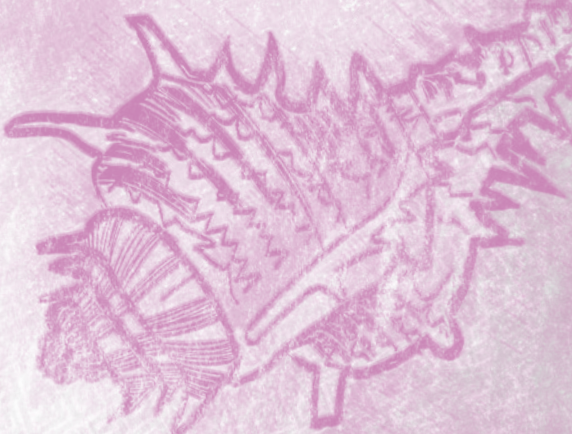
When the scene begins, players take the lead, and the gamemaster steps back a little. Where setting scenes is where the GM has the most power, it is within scenes that the characters have an opportunity to shine, and the GM should endeavor to help the players show off their characters. That often means confronting those characters with challenging obstacles to overcome and deadly perils to survive, because seeing a character when things are tough is often the most satisfying way to engage with the game and the story.

During a scene, the GM's involvement is more limited, relying on the actions of NPCs and uses of Threat to alter things and respond to the actions of the player characters. This places the player characters front-and-center in the action, while giving the GM tools to ramp up the tension and test the player characters' capabilities.

Within a scene, the players will want their characters to do things. It's the GM's responsibility to adjudicate those things, to decide if those things are possible, and to determine what happens afterwards. In many cases, this will be a simple matter, as many of the things the player characters do will be things that anyone can do, and the outcome will be obvious. In the cases that aren't simple, however, the GM can rely on the rules for assistance.

When a player decides that they wish their character to do something, the rules and guidelines for Tests, described in the ***Dreams and Machines Player's Guide*** *(page 62)*, provide a foundation: each time this happens, the GM responds with "yes", "no", or "maybe".

- The gamemaster should answer **Yes** if the action or activity is something that can be achieved easily and without risk or peril. The GM is free to frame this answer with some condition, such as explaining that the action will take time, or that it will draw attention, or have some other potential consequence; this kind of condition is often referred to as "**Yes, but…**"
- The gamemaster should answer **No** if the action or activity is something that cannot be achieved at all. The GM is free to state that there might be some circumstances where the action could be performed, such as obtaining the right tools, special materials, or obscure knowledge, or specialized assistance; this is often referred to as "**No, but…**"
- The gamemaster should answer **Maybe** if the action or activity is something that might be possible. In this case, the character may attempt a Skill Test to see if they succeed.



ACTION ASSUMPTIONS

As a useful rule of thumb, the gamemaster should assume that player characters are competent, driven, and capable when determining whether an action is possible. In general, a player character should be able to accomplish anything given enough time, the right tools, the right knowledge, the opportunity to concentrate, and the absence of serious risk or peril. Skill Tests (or "No" answers) often come in situations where the character lacks one or more of those factors, framing the action as "can the character achieve their goal *in this situation*". In a similar way, a character's Attributes and Skills can be thought of as how good the character is at applying their strengths and their knowledge when under pressure.

- Time comes from the situation, and time pressure is a common problem posed in adventures.
- Tools are either carried by the character, or must be located during play, and lack of tools is a common complication.
- Knowledge is a little more ephemeral, and it may be innate to the character (represented by a Truth or a Focus) or come from research and study (taking time and effort to create an appropriate Advantage). Lack of knowledge may often lead to increased difficulty or increased chance of complications.
- The opportunity to concentrate relies on a lack of distractions. Action scenes such as combat are a common form of distraction.
- Absence of risk or peril allows a character to keep trying even if they make mistakes, succeeding through trial and error. A risky or perilous task means a character can't rely on being able to try again if they fail.

Similarly, this kind of framing also means that failure isn't a matter of incompetence: a character doesn't fail because they screwed up, but rather because something prevented them succeeding. They didn't have enough time, they didn't have the chance to focus, they didn't have the right tools, something or someone interrupted them, or something else of that nature.

Skill Tests can also be used in a "yes, but" situation, if the player wishes to avoid the condition or consequence; this is an ideal situation to use the **Success at Cost** rule, as the Test is about whether the character can avoid the consequence, rather than seeing if they can succeed. Similarly, "no, but" results can also prompt Skill Tests, as characters seek to engineer the circumstances that make an action possible. Additional guidance for GMing Skill Tests can be found on page 100.

Regardless of how the action is resolved, however, the GM is responsible for describing what happens next. The situation will change in response to the actions of characters, both those of the players, and NPCs under the GM's control. The GM may ask the players for their input here, especially where the action heavily involves them — a player character's successes, and their failures, can be given to the player to narrate, within reason — but the GM gets to decide how the world around the PCs responds to those actions.

This response can take many forms. The players' actions could see the scene concluded, with the consequences influencing the next scene, or those actions could be one small part of a larger sequence of events, with adversaries and allies taking their own actions, which in turn prompt more actions from the player characters, and so forth. This will vary based entirely on the scene itself: a scene that is merely a brief conversation between two characters may resolve quickly with few or no dice rolls, while an intense chase or battle might take many rolls and a greater use of the rules to resolve.

Aside from the actions of GM-controlled characters (any NPCs not directly commanded by the players), a gamemaster can influence a scene in progress by spending Threat, which will often be generated by actions and events within the scene itself. These opportunities for Threat use will often be elements of the scene itself, described when the scene was introduced, or created by the actions of characters within the scene. This will be described in full in the **Threat** section on page 105.

WRAPPING THINGS UP, AND MOVING ON

Concluding a scene is as important as starting a new one; indeed, the two are linked; how the gamemaster ends one scene will feed into the start of subsequent scenes.

A scene concludes at a point where there is nothing worthwhile left to do in that place and at that time. If the players decide that they want to leave the area, then that's a call for a new scene. If the players haven't got anything else to do right now — perhaps they're on a stakeout, waiting for an enemy to arrive — then that's a call for a new scene too. If the group is split and the action needs to move to the other part of the group for a while, that's a new scene as well. In most cases, it should be obvious when a scene has ended, as scenes tend to come to a natural conclusion by themselves. The GM also has the means to conclude a scene prematurely, but this should be somewhat rare as it costs a considerable amount of Threat to do.

Concluding a scene often starts with a brief description of the state things are in as the scene ends, especially if the scene is dramatic or action-packed, perhaps describing the last fleeing enemy, or bystanders emerging in the aftermath, or the sounds of help drawing near.

The GM should then ask the players what they want to do next. This, more than anything else, should provide a direction to take the adventure, even if things don't turn out quite how the players expect. The players may have an idea for this immediately, or they may want to discuss it briefly among themselves.

Alongside this, attend to minor rules "upkeep": remind the players to remove all their current Stress, and end any other effects that last until the end of the scene (most Truths fall into this category).

The GM should also think about the events that took place in the scene, and then consider if any of them will have long-term consequences or repercussions, or if there are any elements of that scene which haven't yet been resolved. These may not be immediately relevant in the next scene, but they might impact later scenes, lay the foundation for later adventures, or provide inspiration for Complications and uses of Threat in later scenes.

TIME TO REST

At the end of most scenes, the players can normally expect to be able to take at least a **Breather** rest — a few minutes, sufficient to recover 2 Spirit and recharge some simple items — if they need it.

However, one option the GM has at the end of a scene is to rush or hurry the players. If the next scene is only a short time later, with no opportunity to rest between them — perhaps the characters haven't had time to stop, or the next scene begins only moments later — the GM may spend 2 Threat to reflect this, preventing the players from taking this rest.

FASTER!
No cake for you!!!

SKILL TESTS AND CHALLENGES

Almost any activity where there is doubt in the outcome, where failure or Complications are interesting, or where the degree of success is important can be regarded as one or more Skill Tests. A single Skill Test represents an activity attempting to succeed despite resistance or conflict. Skill Tests should, realistically speaking, be actions completed in one sitting or a short amount of time: searching for clues, repairing a car, or negotiating with a suspect are all examples of a single Skill Test.

As outlined in the ***Dreams and Machine's Player's Guide*** *(page* 62), a Skill Test requires the player to roll two or more d20s, attempting to score equal to or less than one of the character's attributes. It's the gamemaster, along with input from the player involved, who chooses which attribute and skill to use. It's also the GM's role to decide on the Skill Test's Difficulty, on the consequences of failure, and what effect Complications and Momentum may have on the outcome.

RULES AS WRITTEN

In a lot of cases, especially in combat, different situations present default attribute and skill combinations, standard difficulties, and standard consequences for failure, along with specific uses for Momentum and specific effects for complications.

These are to provide a reliable, predictable baseline so that players can make reasonable plans and have reasonable expectations for how events may play out. However, the GM is free to change those details as circumstances dictate, if a situation is markedly different to the norm.

The GM should be careful about making such changes, and they should make any changes clear to the players in that situation so that they're aware that the situation is unusual in some way. It's also recommended that the GM be consistent in how and when they apply such changes, to maintain those reasonable expectations: players uncertain about what they can and can't do may be less willing or able to engage with the adventure.

In a similar way, players can suggest changes of their own if the circumstances fit; perhaps they think a different attribute might be more fitting in this case, or they want to use Momentum in a specific way not covered by the rules. The GM is encouraged to consider these, and possibly to negotiate with the players briefly about changes of this nature: perhaps a player-suggested method is possible, but it's riskier, so the complication range goes up, or perhaps it alters the consequences of failure in some way.

USING TRUTHS

Truths form a framework that assists the GM while framing a scene, by highlighting circumstances that may affect characters in some way, shape, or form. Truths are a versatile tool, and a mixture of them is a useful way to establish situations and environments that characters can navigate or confront effectively.

In the simplest terms, a Truth is a description of something that has been given mechanical 'weight', a description that can influence game mechanically. Truths always describe things that are true about the situation, location, or character, and in turn, if the thing that a Truth describes stops being true, the Truth changes or vanishes as well. Truths aren't inherently advantageous or problematic, but they have the potential to be either or both those things. Truths help the GM define what is possible or impossible in a situation, and help the GM determine how difficult some things are to accomplish.

TRUTHS CAN:

- Make an activity easier (-1 Difficulty on a Skill Test)
- Make an activity harder (+1 Difficulty on a Skill Test, or require a Skill Test where success would normally be automatic)
- Make an activity possible where it wouldn't normally be
- Make an activity impossible where it would normally be possible

In general, +1 and -1 Difficulty will be the most commonly-used effects of a Truth, but they are far from the only ones. The GM can use the existence of a Truth to justify various bonuses and penalties as the situation demands; these might be increased complication range, heightened consequences, and similar effects. For example, if an enemy has a Truth that describes a weakness in its armor, that may grant an attacker the *Breaker* quality on their attacks.

The use of narrative permissions — deciding whether an activity is possible or not — is no less useful an option, particularly as those permissions can be *temporary*. Removing a Truth that makes a Skill Test impossible or adding one that makes the impossible possible are good ways to handle abstract or unusual approaches to problem-solving, and they can help the players and GM alike add extra impact to the events unfolding.

Truths are most often created at the start of a scene, and last for as long as they remain true, which is normally the end of that scene. If the next scene takes place in the same location, then Truths relating to that location may remain, but ones tied to people, situations, or that are time-sensitive, may change accordingly. Persistent character Truths will naturally follow the character around, though temporary ones (reflecting minor injuries, emotional states, and similar) may not linger in the same way. Situational Truths — typically including the kinds of Truths that characters can create — seldom last long, normally vanishing once used in an action scene, or lasting until the end of the scene at most.

Especially potent Truths may be stacked: this is indicated by a number after the Truth's name. A *dense smoke 2* Truth will have twice as much effect on the situation as an ordinary Truth, perhaps increasing Difficulties by 2, or having two different effects.

ADJUDICATING TRUTHS, OR "BECAUSE X, Y"

Handling Truths in play may seem daunting, especially if there's a lot of them in play. In practice, however, judging whether (and how) a Truth applies can be quite straightforward. Each Truth can be placed into a simple statement, such as one of those below, and if that statement makes sense, then it applies. If it doesn't make sense, then it doesn't apply.

- Because I am [Character Truth], this activity is...
- Because of [Situation or Location Truth], this activity is...
- Because I have [Equipment Truth], this activity is...

The end of each of those statements is one of "easier", "harder", "possible", or "impossible".

At the simplest level, that's as far as the GM needs to go: if the statement ends with "easier", reduce the Difficulty, if the statement ends with "harder", increase the Difficulty. If the statement ends with "possible", then the activity can be attempted while the Truth applies, while if it ends with "impossible", then it can't be attempted while that Truth applies.

TEST DIFFICULTY

Difficulties represent how challenging a Skill Test is, based on environment, opposition, obstacles, and similar factors. Truths are a key part of this, and while most basic Skill Tests have a Difficulty of 1 or 2, it's important to remember that the GM sets the final Difficulty, and thus can increase it accordingly. Truths representing hazardous environments, obscurity of information, a lack of preparation or appropriate tools, or other problems can all increase the Difficulty of routine Skill Tests. If it feels appropriate that a situation should increase the Difficulty of a Skill Test, then the GM has the freedom to do that.

Structuring the timing of these Difficulties in a game session can also be a consideration. Starting a scene with a Difficulty 4 or 5 Test isn't recommended unless the scene absolutely demands it; there's always the possibility to ramp up the Difficulty of Tests as the action progresses. On the other side of things, if something is necessary for the story to continue, then keep the Difficulty low or allow Success at Cost to ensure that a failed Skill Test can't easily stall progress. In general, a variety of Difficulties, rising and falling throughout the session, is often an appropriate tool for pacing an adventure.

Environmental Truths adjust the Difficulty of Skill Test, based on whether they are helpful or a hindrance to a character, and such a Truth may be beneficial in some ways and problematic in others: a heavily-crowded area may make it easier to avoid notice, but it'll make rapid movement more difficult. Think carefully about the circumstances of a scene, taking note of the Truths and Complications, and judge the Difficulty accordingly.

Finally, making judgments based on the mood and preferences of the players is also key to the Difficulty of Skill Tests. Few groups enjoy constantly having to beat the odds by facing an abundance of Difficulty 4 or 5 Tests, but some revel in rising to such challenges. If the group has just faced off against a difficult opponent, tension will have been running high, so allowing a few easier Skill Tests will help release that tension, giving players a bit of a break and allowing them to generate some much-needed Momentum. And of course, sometimes players just have a bad night with a string of unlucky rolls; nobody thinks badly of a GM who eases off the pressure when the dice are falling badly, if it allows the fun and the story to continue.

THREAT, MOMENTUM, AND TEST DIFFICULTY

While Truths can have a lasting impact upon the Difficulty of Skill Tests, short-term Difficulty changes can often come about because of uses of Momentum or Threat.

These options can be used when a situation becomes momentarily more Difficult, either because of the vagaries of some environmental factor (such as smoke, a crowd, or something similar; this may be represented by a Truth, where the Truth alone may not be reason enough to increase the Test's Difficulty) or because of the actions of another character creating a distraction, obstruction, or other problem.

Regardless of how they are used, changing Difficulty by spending Momentum or Threat must be done before the decision to buy bonus d20s for that Test is made: it would be decidedly unfair to see if a player wants to buy any dice before choosing to change the Difficulty.

RISKS, COSTS, AND CONSEQUENCES

A crucial part of adjudicating a Skill Test, and one commonly overlooked, is the effects of failure. If the Skill Test is to avoid some dangerous effect or situation, then the effects of failure are obvious: the character didn't avoid the danger. But in situations where a character is attempting to achieve something, it is important to determine what will happen if they fail to achieve their goal; after all, if there's no cost or consequence for their failure, then why didn't they just succeed automatically?

Risks, costs, and consequences are all different ways to express "what goes wrong". They don't necessarily represent something going irrevocably wrong, but rather help to provide the GM with a sense of nuance about what could go wrong from a Skill Test, and in turn convey those potential problems to the players. There's a lot of overlap between the three ideas, but in general terms, they can be described as follows:

- A **risk** is something that *might* happen because of a Skill Test. It isn't guaranteed to happen, but it could occur if the player suffers a complication. It doesn't change whether the Test succeeds, but it might still change the outcome one way or another.
- A **cost** is something that must be paid or faced to get a desired outcome, but which can be avoided. This turns up with the option to **Succeed at Cost** (where a failed Skill Test allows the character to get a minimum success if they also suffer a complication), but the GM may frame a cost for allowing a Skill Test to be attempted in the first place.
- A **consequence** is something that *will* happen because of action; it might be the result of a failed test, or it might come automatically if the Test is even attempted.

When setting the Difficulty of a Skill Test, the GM should consider the things that could go wrong. These can naturally serve as inspiration for how to handle any complications that may occur, but they can also serve as the result of a failed test. Similarly, if a player wants to attempt something that is particularly tough, or which shouldn't be too straightforward to attempt, it may be worthwhile considering a cost for that Test. These are all powerful tools for the GM that can be interwoven with all the other rules of the game to create something thrilling, dynamic, and evocative.

Of course, it's easy to simply say "think of the things that could go wrong", but it's harder to do that in practice, at least without some guidance or experience. Fortunately, fiction provides us with a variety of different problems that occur frequently that can serve as inspiration.

- **Price:** A straightforward problem is a price, usually in the form of lost resources. This might be a character's Supply Points, Spirit, the charge in a powered item, or some other tangible resource, but it could easily be a loss of Momentum, or adding to Threat, or even something like losing a beneficial Truth.
- **Injury:** Equally straightforward, suffering damage and risking Injury is useful as a risk, cost, or consequence.

- **Revelation:** The character reveals something that they didn't intend to, such as something they know, or even where they are. Alternatively, the character may learn something that they wish wasn't true which could complicate later actions, such as finding out that the enemy leader has extra guards, or that they are about to head somewhere else. Revelations can be useful ways for the GM to introduce new ways to spend Threat or set up other problems like time pressure.
- **Confusion:** The character miscommunicates or otherwise creates uncertainty, leading to upset, poor timing, offense, or misunderstanding. Only applicable where there's an audience, confusion can lead to problems with teamwork or make an adversary respond in an unexpected manner.
- **Waste:** Like price, but where a price is intentional, waste is the misuse or misapplication of resources. This is useful in situations where a character might already have the option to use those resources: a character firing a powered gun may find that the weapon has been discharged, for example. Alternatively, waste may represent being inefficient or reckless in some other way, perhaps with a character leaving themselves exposed to reprisals. In a conflict, a character may find themselves unable to act or react as they might wish, or they lose some other defensive benefit.
- **Ineffectiveness:** The effect of the Skill Test is less than expected in some way, or the character's success is only partial or incomplete. The character still gets the minimum of what they wanted to achieve, but that success is imperfect and may result in problems. This might reduce the damage rating of an attack, or it may mean that a distraction doesn't occupy an adversary for as long as desired.
- **Overkill:** The character succeeds *too well*. The character becomes a victim of their own success, gaining unintended effects from the outcome. A lie told to gain access somewhere causes the guard to treat you as a VIP. A disguise attracts the attention of people other than your intended target. A bomb to blow a hole in a wall also makes the ceiling above unstable. A gunshot goes through the target and hits a bystander as well.
- **Delay:** Sometimes, things just take longer than anticipated. Perhaps a delay allows the enemy to prepare for the characters' arrival, or it allows pursuing guards to catch up. Perhaps a delay means the character can't join the rest of the group in the next scene (maybe they'll turn up part-way through the scene instead of at the start), or it means they can't be chosen to act first in the next Round.
- **Closed Path:** A possible problem is that a specific way of doing something is no longer possible, at least in the short term, and the characters will have to find a different approach. A character tries picking a lock to find that the door is bolted shut. A character can no longer rely on a specific informant or ally. Witnesses are too scared to come forward.

In practice, many of these may end up having similar outcomes, but they are useful starting points to consider when deciding the outcomes of different Skill Tests.

More than that, they can also be used to help structure problematic situations: a situation may be presented as a series of overlapping, interlocking problems, each of which is part of a Truth, and each of which can be 'disarmed'. This kind of structure is a great way to design heists and similar situations.

Of course, the nature of a problem is only half the story. The GM should also consider the severity of problems. This should be relatively straightforward most of the time, but it's worthy of consideration, as it can be a useful 'lever' for the GM to adjust during play.

The severity of a problem is, in short, how big the problem is. This is something independent of how difficult the Skill Test is — a Skill Test can be extremely difficult, but with only relatively mild consequences, or it could be easy, but with a major cost.

As a basic guide, we can approach severity from the perspective of complications, as that ties neatly into the existing framework of Skill Tests — a risk represents a potential Complication effect, and unsurprisingly the Success at Cost rule ties neatly into the idea of cost, which covers two of the ways these problems are commonly used. While it doesn't really cover consequences, it's a useful enough baseline to work with. Complications have two universal outcomes — create a Truth or add 2 to Threat — which means that they are useful for quantifying a problem. If a problem is equivalent to two complications, then it's equal to 4 Threat, for example.

And, just as with Difficulty, the GM may spend Threat or apply Truths and complications to increase the severity of a problem (though a single Truth or complication should only have a single effect on a Skill Test at a time). For example, if an area of building has the *unstable* Truth, then the GM may use this to add to the severity of Tests to cross that terrain, while a *poorly lit* Truth might make Tests for observation somewhat ineffective rather than more difficult. This is where consequences can come in, with Truths providing justification for problems occurring on failed Skill Tests.

The Threat section, below, provides guidance for how differing amounts of Threat can translate into mechanical effects. In general, however, there's no hard-and-fast way to measure or quantify some problems: the GM should rely on their judgment and experience, and how the players respond to the problems they face.

PLAYER-DRIVEN PROBLEMS

While problems are mainly a consideration for the gamemaster, players can have some input here.

As already noted, a problem may be represented or caused by something else present in-game, typically a Truth or complication; players can engage with and eliminate the problem by attempting to remove or circumvent that Truth. This is a useful way of presenting traps and similar artificial hazards, and it encourages creative approaches to problem-solving.

The other way that players might wish to engage with problems is by adjusting risk and reward. A player may offer to face a problem, or a more severe problem, in exchange for increasing the benefits of success (typically manifesting as bonus Momentum for a successful Skill Test). For example, a character may feel that they could search an office for incriminating evidence more effectively if they weren't concerned about making noise, increasing the risk of being heard, but making it more likely that they'll find what they're looking for.

THREAT

Threat is discussed briefly in the ***Dreams and Machines Player's Guide*** and mentioned frequently throughout the rules. While that description is sufficient for players, the gamemaster needs a deeper understanding of what Threat is, what it represents, what it does, and how it can be employed in play.

At its simplest level, Threat is a mechanic that can be used to raise the stakes of a scene or even a whole adventure. It allows the GM to alter and manipulate elements in a scene without direct action from NPCs, providing and shaping twists, turns, and challenges for the player characters to overcome.

The gamemaster begins each adventure with a set amount of Threat based on the number of players in the game, as well as numerous opportunities to gain more during play. Each adventure will have numerous opportunities to spend that Threat to empower NPCs, change the situation, and create problems for the player characters. In this way, the Threat pool grows and shrinks as characters act and react in each scene.

Threat is a means of building tension — the more Threat the GM possesses, the greater the likelihood that something will endanger or imperil the player characters. Strictly speaking, the player characters don't know how much Threat the GM has, but their instincts may tell them when something seems too easy, or they may "have a bad feeling" when danger draws near, giving them a sense of the peril that awaits them.

As the adventure progresses, the GM may spend a large amount of Threat in one scene, creating a difficult and dangerous situation… but also producing a release of tension afterwards as Threat is now low. They may alternatively choose to allow Threat to build over successive scenes, spending only a little until a climactic event occurs. In this way, Threat mimics and emulates the rising and falling tension of dramatic storytelling, often culminating in a grand finale.

THE PRINCIPLES OF THREAT

A tool for pacing and dramatic storytelling aside, Threat is best thought of as an abstract representation of all the things that might go wrong at any given moment. It's all the unknown variables, and the unfolding conspiracies, and the malign influence of powerful foes, and the clamor and clangor of battle, and the chaos that can erupt when tension runs high. It's *Murphy's law* ("anything that can go wrong, will go wrong") quantified, and it's the bullets in *Chekhov's gun* (a dramatic principle whereby elements introduced into a story must pay off or they are superfluous).

During a scene, Threat is one of the two methods by which the gamemaster can influence events: the other being the actions of NPCs. As a result, it is powerful and evocative if used well, and it is extremely versatile… but it is also finite, with the quantity often defined by the actions that take place in the scene. Where some ways of gaining and spending Threat are straightforward and self-explanatory — in any instance where a player character could use Momentum, an NPC can use Threat, for example

— others may require more work from the GM to use in a satisfying way. Key to this are the following principles:

FORESHADOWING

It is never a bad idea to describe ways that Threat could be gained, or effects could be triggered by spending Threat, in advance of using them. During the action, the GM may describe a problem that could occur. By describing this problem in advance, if the GM uses that problem to gain or spend Threat, it doesn't come "out of nowhere", and thus feels like an organic part of the situation rather than something arbitrary.

Truths can provide a solid basis for this: if a walkway or bridge is unstable, then a Truth which reflects that can be ample justification for uses of Threat, and this can easily be included when establishing the scene. During a scene, Complications, the effects of failed Skill Tests, or the cost to attempt or succeed at something can all be used as opportunities for the GM to introduce new uses for Threat.

In addition to making use of Threat seem natural and fitting, foreshadowing also gives the players a chance to try and prevent or avoid that problem. This may turn into an extra objective for the player characters to pursue, or they may decide that they've got too much to do already and ignore that potential problem.

THE SPOTLIGHT

When the GM gains or spends Threat, the resulting effects can serve to draw attention to specific themes and ideas, or to certain elements of a scene, or to an individual character. This in turn creates new opportunities for the players to engage with the situation. In general, using Threat to highlight things can make the game more engaging, rather than simply using Threat to make things more difficult.

With a **thematic spotlight**, the GM can use Threat to pick out a specific concept that is particularly central to the adventure or to the campaign. Spending Threat to introduce specific types of challenge or problem, such as large numbers of enemies and frequent reinforcements, can encourage a subtle, considered approach, favoring stealth and guile. Alternatively, the GM may use Threat to dissuade a certain type of action: in a game where lethal force is frowned upon, the GM can declare that player characters attempting to kill enemies add to Threat, while NPCs attempting to use deadly force must spend Threat; this extra level of cost to trying to kill can guide player choices, and it helps to create adventures where trying to negotiate with or subdue enemies is more commonplace than simply shooting them in the face.

A **situation spotlight** draws attention back to a specific part of the current scene. This might be to a specific place within the environment, such as the GM spending Threat to make a crumbling building start to collapse, or it might be a specific character, such as a leader or priority target (often using an ability unique to that character). It might even be a single objective: the GM may spend more Threat on adversaries trying to reach a specific location or attack a specific character, if that aids their goal. This can be a useful way to add urgency to a situation, especially if things have seemed too easy for the players up until that point. Alternately, the GM may wish to try adding one or two to Threat periodically (either in general, or because of NPC actions, like setting explosives or building a weapon) to represent a ticking clock or escalating problem, to urge the players to action if they're being overly cautious.

A **character opportunity** is a situation where attention is drawn to a player character. This can resolve itself in a few ways: the GM may present a problem which that character is ideally-suited to solve, allowing that character to show off for a bit, or it might change circumstances which play to a character's personality or backstory, engaging the player by bringing their part of the story to the fore, often by facing them with a dilemma or a tough choice. Occasionally, the GM may wish to play to the weaknesses of a specific character or put them in a situation where their strengths become a liability, but this should be done sparingly if at all, as some players can feel picked on, making the game feel adversarial rather than collaborative.

DITHERING

Sometimes players spend too long debating a situation and don't spend enough time actually doing things. This can suit some groups fine — many groups enjoy an intricate, carefully-devised plan — but other groups may end up going talking in circles, needing a little nudge to get them to decide on a course of action (even if it's as simple as who goes next in combat).

In these situations, particularly in time-sensitive situations like combat, the GM may wish to announce to the group that their debating and time-wasting will add to Threat… and if this doesn't stir them to action, add 2 points to Threat.

This Threat could even be spent right away to change the situation in such a way that makes the players react and gets the game moving again.

CAUSALITY

Because Threat is in large part provided by character action, it helps provide a balance to the game, ensuring that the "pressure" that the player characters apply to a situation is met with equal force by their opposition.

Threat serves as a visible cause-and-effect for players taking risks and facing the problems that come along with it. The GM's use of Threat feeds from circumstances in-game; the protagonists push their luck, and fate pushes back. This provides the players with an understanding of how their choices influence the problems they face and gives the gamemaster a clear license to create those problems on the fly.

The causality of Threat means providing a narrative link between the ways that Threat is gained during a scene, and the effects that come from spending it. It doesn't have to apply to every time the GM gains or spends Threat, but a few key instances can help a feel of continuity and verisimilitude.

A good example of this might be a character adding to Threat to buy dice when climbing a crumbling cliff, and the GM spending some of that Threat later to make the cliff begin to subside, or enemies sounding an alarm, which adds Threat points which the GM then spends to bring in reinforcements.

PROPORTIONATE RESISTANCE

Because Threat can often be gained through the actions of the player characters, this means that the players have considerable control over the amount of Threat the gamemaster has available during a scene. Cautious, reluctant, or careful players may give very little Threat (as may new players who aren't comfortable with the idea of empowering the GM), while aggressive or determined players can flood the GM with additional Threat.

Players reluctant to add to Threat may find themselves Momentum-starved at crucial moments, making higher-Difficulty Skill Tests and other challenging situations more difficult to overcome, while players more comfortable with giving the GM Threat can blast through difficult situations with relative ease, as they'll always have the extra dice and other benefits they need, and can generate extra Momentum accordingly.

Thus, the GM should watch the group's behavior, and their approach to Threat, to help guide decisions made during the game, such as numbers of enemies and Difficulty of Skill Tests. The GM's use of Threat should also be adjusted accordingly: if players generate a lot of Threat, then that Threat can be used to put pressure on those players in turn, so that the players have a degree of control over how big a challenge they will face.

If the players are wary of Threat, and reluctant to provide the GM with any, then the GM should use Threat sparingly; Threat use may need to be rationed anyway, as there isn't as much available. Also, using effects that alter the circumstances rather than just amp up the Difficulty can be good for the game in general. Players wary of Threat often feel afraid of it being used to "punish" them later, so using it in more narrative and less confrontational or adversarial ways can help. It can also help if Threat is used in small quantities, rather than saving up for a bigger effect: a large pool of Threat can seem ominous, especially for players expecting some big, catastrophic expenditure.

If the players give Threat freely, then the GM should use Threat eagerly and often: using Threat roughly as often as the players generate it is a good benchmark. Players that give Threat freely tend to fall into one of two categories: players looking for a challenge, and players who don't regard Threat as particularly threatening. In the former case, spending Threat gives the player what they want.

In the latter case, spending Threat regularly means that the player doesn't come to regard adding to Threat as consequence-free — an ever-growing pool of Threat may seem intimidating, but if the GM never spends any it may seem to have no bearing on play at all.

In either case, the GM can still regulate the flow of Threat — spending it more frequently than it is gained will reduce the size of the Threat pool and make the situation less tense, while spending it less frequently than it is gained allows the pool, and the tension it represents, to grow.

STATUS GAUGE

An interesting use of Threat doesn't rely on how Threat is gained or spent: instead, it considers simply how much Threat there is. The overall quantity of Threat can be used as a gauge for the situation currently playing out. This is a useful trick when handling games focused on infiltration or subterfuge (though it works in other situations too), as the amount of Threat can provide a useful guide for how NPCs will act. Higher Threat means adversaries will be alert, wary, and quick to respond, while bystanders may withdraw from the area or hide if startled.

This provides a greater sense of feedback for Threat, with an effect more visible and pervasive than individual uses of Threat. It is especially valuable in situations where the peril is contained within the local environment — such as a single building, a compound, or some other restricted area — or where there is some supernatural phenomenon in play that Threat can represent… or both, such as a haunted house or similar environment.

If the situation is one where Threat will fluctuate heavily, Threat can signal a change in NPC behavior: if high Threat means that an enemy is alert and vigilant, then spending Threat for that enemy can represent the effort and intensity of their search, which will pass in time. As Threat decreases, those enemies will relax their efforts, let their guard down, and go back to their normal patrols, but an increase in Threat will increase their alertness again. This produces a degree of dynamic feedback, where actions that feed and draw from Threat influence the situation in passive ways as well as more active and immediate ones.

GAINING THREAT

The gamemaster begins every adventure with a set amount of Threat, based on both the number of players and on the underlying tension and danger of the adventure itself. By default, this is 2 Threat per player character, but some adventures may begin with a larger or smaller number.

- A **low stakes** adventure begins with 1 Threat per player character. These adventures are likely to be simple, straightforward affairs. This is useful for short one-off games, while in a campaign it suits low-key adventures that serve as a reprieve after a few tense adventures.
- A **high stakes** adventure begins with 3 Threat per player character. These adventures are likely to be high in action, drama, and uncertainty. In a campaign, several adventures may lead up to a high stakes adventure, building in tension over time.
- A **catastrophic** adventure begins with 4 Threat per player character. These adventures are likely to be explosive, whether literally or figuratively, and are ideally suited to climactic struggles against major adversaries. They should also be extremely rare, used as the very climax of a campaign.

Once an adventure has begun, the gamemaster can spend and gain Threat as they see fit. The GM gains Threat through a variety of situations and circumstances, as described below.

THREAT FROM THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

A significant source of Threat is the player characters, who can add to Threat through their choices and through random chance.

Instead of Momentum: Whenever a player character could spend Momentum, even if they do not have any Momentum left to spend, they may choose to pay some or all the cost by adding to Threat. Each point of Threat added to the GM's pool counts as one Momentum towards whatever use of Momentum the player character wishes to use. NPCs allied to the player characters generate Threat in this way as well.

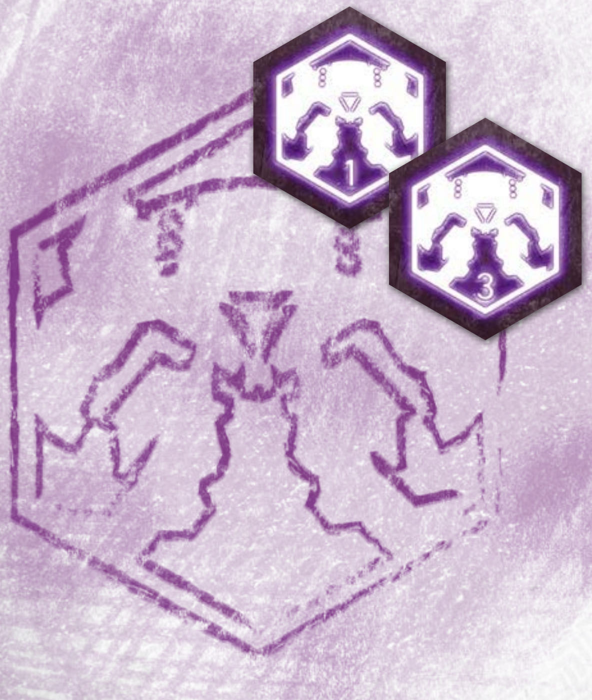
This is a simple option, but one entirely at the discretion of the players, and as already discussed, different players will have different attitudes to giving the GM Threat.

Complications: Whenever a player character suffers one or more complications on a Skill Test, they or the GM may choose to add two points to Threat to "buy off" the complication.

A bit of random chance means there'll often be a trickle of Threat coming from the players over the course of an adventure. The GM can adjust this by altering the complication range of different Skill Tests (where appropriate), and that change of complication range comes naturally from worsening situations (fear and panic make characters more prone to mistakes), but it still depends on how the dice fall and cannot be relied upon.

Escalation: The GM — or the rules — may note that specific actions or decisions risk Escalation, making a situation more dangerous or unpredictable. If a character performs an action that risks Escalation, they immediately add one to Threat.

The GM should be consistent in this, and instances of Escalation should be appropriate to the theme and style of the game. However, use of lethal force, or carrying heavy or military-grade weapons into a populated area, are both actions that commonly risk Escalation. The GM should declare that an action risks Escalation, and then allow the player character to choose whether they wish to continue with that choice: springing an Escalation cost on a player after the fact is unlikely to be well-received.



OTHER SOURCES OF THREAT

The GM has a couple of other ways of generating Threat, which give them additional control over how much Threat is available and how that reflects the events going on in the game.

Threatening Circumstances: The environment or situation of a new scene may be threatening or dangerous in some way, adding one or two Threat to the pool automatically when the scene begins. Some NPCs may generate Threat simply by turning up (this is covered by the *Menacing* special ability, in *Chapter 5: Adversaries and NPCs, page 124*), in response to changes in the situation (often noted in the NPC's special abilities or talents), or by taking certain actions. Sometimes, the environment may have specific ways of increasing Threat when interacted with: an alarm that can be triggered, heavy or dangerous machinery that can be activated, or flammable materials that could burn or explode.

This method is easy to abuse, but it can be fun for the players if used carefully and thematically. Actions and situations that generate Threat are more interesting in play than effects that simply generate Threat automatically, as they help reinforce a sense of cause-and-effect as well as being something that the players can try to interrupt or prevent. Allies with the *Menacing* ability are an interesting idea too — it's a nice compromise for having a capable friend, as their presence draws attention that helps offset their abilities.

Adversary Momentum: Adversary NPCs with unspent Momentum may spend that Momentum to add to Threat. Each Momentum spent adds one to Threat.

This is an important option, as it can allow the players' enemies to build up Threat through their normal actions. A useful trick here is to have "minions" who generate Momentum on their Skill Tests which then gets used by their leader, or to have smaller battles with enemies who dump all their Momentum into Threat rather than spend it on themselves, creating a fight that was "suspiciously easy" to build up to a later scene.

SPENDING THREAT

The gamemaster's options for using Threat are more diverse and numerous than the ways of generating Threat, and this is deliberate: there are always more things you could use Threat on than there is Threat to spend on those things.

Adversary Momentum: Threat serves in part as a mirror of the players' Momentum pool. Thus, Adversary NPCs may spend Threat in all the ways that the player characters can use Momentum.

A simple and straightforward option. It is entirely possible to run a game using the 2d20 System and only use Threat for this purpose, ignoring all the narrative elements of Threat to use it as "evil Momentum".

Adversary Threat Costs: On any action where a player character would be required to add one or more points to Threat, an Adversary NPC performing the same action or making the same choice must spend an equivalent number of points of Threat. Similarly, some Adversaries will have special abilities which are triggered by spending Threat.

This is less a use and more a cost, a way to balance the scales by ensuring that Adversaries pay for things just like the player characters do.

Adversary Complications: If an Adversary NPC suffers a complication, the GM may buy off that complication by spending two Threat, a natural counterpart to how the rules work for player characters.

Complication: The Gamemaster may create a Complication by spending two Threat. This must come naturally from the current situation.

This can be a useful way to generate complications without waiting for them to occur, but it should be used sparingly. Ideal opportunities for this option include failed Skill Tests, or from NPC actions, but as a rule of thumb, a complication should only ever occur in reaction to an event, rather than appearing out of nowhere.

Reinforcements: The GM may bring in additional Adversary NPCs during a scene. Normal NPCs cost one Threat each. A group of Normal NPCs costs Threat equal to half the number of NPCs in the group, rounded up. In a conflict, this should be done at the start of a round, with the reinforcements able to act during that round as normal. This does not apply to NPCs who are present at the start of the scene, only additional ones who arrive while the scene is in progress. There must be some logical reason why those reinforcements have arrived and where they've come from.

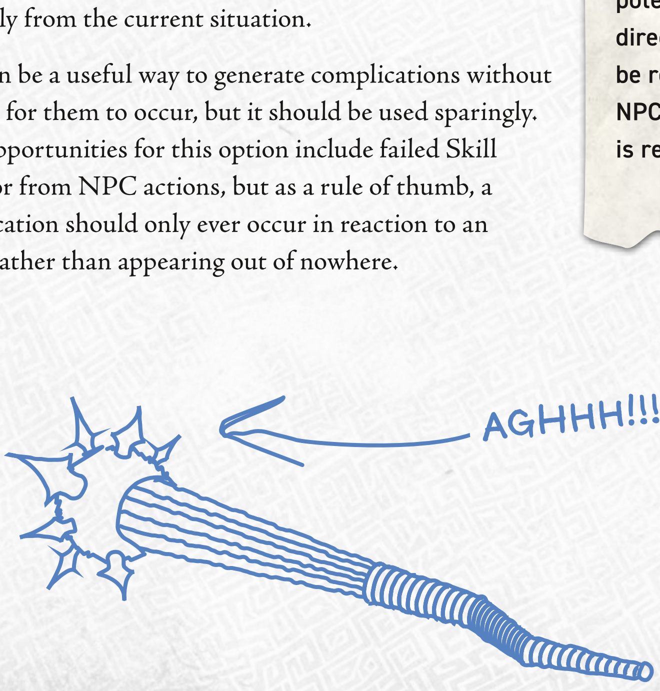
This is a powerful tool, in part because it allows the GM to scale a conflict according to the player characters' abilities on the fly. Justifications for reinforcements are easy to devise and it can be used to refocus an action scene on its objectives rather than simply trying to defeat all the enemies (the player characters can't "defeat all the enemies" if there's an endless supply).

The last option, Environmental Effects and Narrative Changes, requires a more in-depth examination, so it receives its own section, below.

PERSONAL THREAT

Many NPCs, especially Major NPCs like Wakers, have a pool of Personal Threat which they can use in place of the GM's main Threat pool.

In practical terms, this is a lot like the Spirit pool that player characters have, giving these powerful NPCs extra potency. These points can only be spent on effects which directly benefit the NPC they belong to, and they cannot be replenished during the course of a scene. If the same NPC appears again in a later scene, their Personal Threat is refilled.


AGHHH!!! This looks like a threat to me!

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS AND NARRATIVE CHANGES

The options a GM has for using Threat are not limited to those primarily-mechanical options discussed above. Indeed, many of the most potent and most dramatic options have a more far-reaching effect than simply buying extra dice or altering Test Difficulty.

Dramatic scenes often play out in exciting environments, whether crumbling stairs in ancient ruins, the turbulent shallows of a river crossing, the bustling indifference of a busy town, a rocky cliff with waves thundering against the jagged shore, the pounding music of a harvest festival, or even more evocative locations. When describing scenes, the GM will already have defined what the environment is like, and they should typically aim to have the environment enhance the scene: a scene with an evocative backdrop will be much more memorable and interesting. There's no reason to use bland or uninteresting locales, as the gamemaster has control over where each scene takes place.

Furthermore, the gamemaster can use Threat to bring that environment to the fore, putting the environment into motion in some fashion, or by taking obvious elements from the Truths and other descriptions, and emphasizing or developing them. Similarly, the GM can employ Threat to perform a few different narrative tricks and techniques that can add twists, turns, and other story elements to the game. Either way, these effects cost Threat.

As a rule of thumb, environmental and narrative effects of this sort come in a few distinct categories.

- **Incidental Effects** cost one Threat, and they appear in play as things such as flickering lights, unstable floors, and thick smoke. These don't cause a significant problem, but might increase the complication range of a Skill Test by one, make some routine action require a Difficulty 1 Skill Test when success would normally be automatic, or require a Difficulty 1 Skill Test to avoid a problem. This effect may come from something which is persistent but varied, representing that problem at its worst: the unstable floor may give way a little, making a character stumble, while billowing smoke may obscure vision at the worst moment, hindering vision for a split second. The effect applies to a single character when the Threat is spent; extra Threat may be spent to affect additional characters, though it shouldn't affect too many characters at once.
- A **Change of Circumstances** is more significant, and such an effect should cost at least two Threat. An environmental effect like this can be represented by taking an existing location or situation Truth, and then replacing it with another Truth of the same type (such as going from bright light to deep darkness), or by adding a new Truth that alters the situation in some way, shape, or form. It may make an area more difficult to traverse or force a different route to be found (such as blocking a path with thick mud or falling debris). Each Truth changed, added, or removed costs 2 Threat, and some changes of circumstances could see several Truths change in quick succession.
- **Immediate Hazards** inflict damage suddenly on a single character. Physical damage can come from factors like fire, collapsing structures, falling, dangerous chemicals, traps, and other perils, and there should be a Truth present to represent the risk of such hazards. The number of points of Threat spent determines the damage rating, as well as if any other effects apply. The nature of the Injury and any associated qualities chosen should make sense for the environmental hazard represented: an explosion of fuel or other flammable chemical could inflict a *burning* 4 Injury, to one or more characters, for example, while a collapsing structure might inflict a *pinned and trapped* 3 Injury. An immediate hazard applies its effects instantly, but characters affected may attempt a Skill Test to resist or avoid the effects.
- **Lingering Hazards** are effects applied to an area (one zone), which deal damage to anyone within that area, at the start of each round. This may represent something like a raging fire, radiation, choking fumes, or a room flooding with corrosive chemicals. The GM should spend the Threat to create a Truth describing this effect when the player characters first become aware of it. Lingering Hazards may generate Threat over time, building to something more severe, or they may be precarious, representing an unstable situation that could go wrong at any time. Remember that, while it affects a whole area and potentially multiple characters, cunning players may figure out ways to use it against their enemies.

- **Dividing the Group** can complicate the player characters' plans like nothing else. Perhaps a door slams shut behind part of the group, or a section of floor collapses beneath them, or a means of climbing like a ladder or staircase breaks. Whatever happens, some circumstance has contrived to separate the group temporarily. When used, the gamemaster splits the group into two, choosing how many and which characters end up in which part of the group. The gamemaster then pays Threat equal to the number of player characters in the larger of the two parts of the group. The two parts of the group cannot directly interact with one another while divided — though they may still be able to communicate by shouting or using radios — and reuniting the group will require some time and effort. At the very most, the separation lasts only until the end of the current scene.
- A **Reveal** shows the player characters some fact that they wish wasn't true. This could be an ally betraying the player characters, or it could be the discovery that that the situation they're in is an ambush, or that there's a bomb in the room. This sets up a new situation, changing the nature of the scene — perhaps a social conflict or stealthy approach becomes a combat, or perhaps there's now a challenge to overcome, or time pressure that applies. A Reveal costs 4 Threat.
- A **Reversal** is a significant turning point or change of fortunes, and the gamemaster may only use this once per adventure. By spending two Threat per player character present in the scene, the gamemaster ends the scene immediately, with the situation unresolved. The gamemaster describes how the situation escalates or deteriorates in a major way — such as an overwhelming number of enemy reinforcements or some other imminent catastrophe — and then the scene ends. The reversal cannot be used to harm or kill the player characters directly, only to radically change their circumstances, and the players should be given a few moments to discuss their new situation before the gamemaster sets a new scene. As the GM chose how the previous scene ended, they can use it to set up the next scene in a specific way. To compensate the player characters for facing this reversal, let each of the PCs recover half their maximum Spirit when the scene ends.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS IN PLAY

In theory, everything needed to introduce environmental hazards during your games of *Dreams & Machines* is already present in the game. However, there are a number of useful tricks, tips, and practices that help get the most out of the game mechanics for these kinds of dangers and perils.

- **Every Hazard comes from a Truth.** In a scene, including a Truth that describes what the Hazard is serves as a starting point. This is a clear signal to the players that the scene is dangerous. A Truth like *burning building*, *unstable ruins*, or *irradiated* essentially declares that you'll be doing things like spending Threat to inflict Injuries or other problems on the players. Such Truths may be part of a scene from the start (in which case, there's no need to spend Threat to create them), or they may be something that changes or is revealed during the scene (in which case, spend 2 Threat to add the Truth to the scene).
- **The Hazard Takes a Turn.** If including a hazardous environment as part of an action scene, treat the Hazard itself as a creature, and have it take a turn in the action order. On the Hazard's turn, either describe how the Hazard is making the situation worse and add one or two points to the Threat pool, or spend some Threat to have the Hazard actually affect one or more of the PCs.
- **Exploring Hazards.** A Hazard encountered outside of an action scene is likely to be a slow danger, accompanying the slower pace of exploration. Exploring an irradiated pre-War power station is about care and caution, and the nature of the danger is one that manifests more slowly too. Let the Hazard develop in response to player actions, and have effects which kick in every hour or so (in-game) of exploration. Regardless, make it *absolutely clear* that the PCs cannot stop and rest while exploring somewhere hazardous.
- **Complications contribute to the Peril.** When a character suffers a complication during the scene, have that complication interact with the Hazard. A stray shot makes the ruins more unstable, or ignites something flammable. A hurried sprint disturbs a layer of irradiated dust, filling the air with a dangerous cloud. Even if the complication is just used to add to Threat, it can feed that back into the Hazard. The GM can similarly use the Success at Cost rule to have these kinds of effects occur when the characters fail certain Skill Tests. For NPCs, having them fall victim to the same Hazards is an ideal way to use complications.
- **Hazards are Attacks the Environment Makes.** A sudden burst of flame, a blast of noxious gas or superheated steam, a pile of collapsing rocks, or a splash of toxic chemicals are all, functionally, the same as an NPC making an attack. There's no will or intent behind these attacks, but they inflict Injuries all the same. As a baseline, an Injury with a damage rating of 2 should cost 1 Threat to make, and the targeted character can make a Skill Test (such as a **Quickness (Move)** Test to dodge falling debris, or a **Might (Survive)** Test to resist toxins or contaminants) with a Difficulty of 2 to avoid the Hazard, and the right equipment (such as environment suits for toxic gasses, radiation, etc.) can affect these Tests. Characters can spend Spirit to avoid these Injuries as normal. A table on the next page has some further suggestions on how to modify this.
- **Inflicting Truths.** Injuries are a very immediate, very urgent effect of a Hazard, but they're not the only one to play with. A Hazard can also add extra Truths to a scene, or to a character, costing 2 Threat as normal. A raging fire might produce *thick smoke* Truths, making it harder to see and even hinder breathing, or it might spread the Hazard to other nearby zones. A toxic or radioactive environment might leave characters *contaminated*, potentially carrying some of the Hazard with them. These Truths can hinder characters going forwards, and may need special circumstances or extra effort to remove. They can be used in turn to prompt other problems: a *poisoned* or *irradiated* character might fall sick, and be unable to recover from Exhaustion until they get medicine.

EFFECT	THREAT COST	DETAILS
+1 Damage Rating	1	You may be bought multiple times.
Breaker	1	The Hazard gains the *Breaker* quality. Protection from Armor against this Injury is reduced as a result.
Non-Lethal	-1	The Hazard gains the *Non-Lethal* quality. Injuries inflicted by a Non-Lethal hazard are instantly healed (and removed completely) when treated by an ally, or at the start of the next scene, whichever happens first.
Additional Target	1	The Hazard affects one additional character per Threat spent. Each character may Test to avoid the Hazard individually.
Blast	+2	The Hazard affects *all* characters within the zone - PCs and NPCs alike. Each character may Test to avoid the Hazard individually.
Easier to Avoid	-2	The Skill Test to avoid the Hazard is only Difficulty 1. This can reduce the cost to 0.
Harder to Avoid	+2	The Skill Test to avoid the Hazard is Difficulty 3.

EMERGENCY
EVACUATION

I think that's enough hazards now thanks!

RUNNING ACTION SCENES

As described in the ***Player's Guide***, an adventure or session of ***Dreams & Machines*** is normally broken up into scenes, just like a novel, TV show, movie, or other story. Normally, that's enough, and a loose structure like that is ideal for a lot of situations during the game. However, during a conflict scene, where the situation changes moment to moment and the stakes of each action are higher, it can be useful to be a little more structured. So, we break things down further, down to individual **actions**. Actions are part of play in any scene, but in action scenes they have a little more importance.

Action scenes differ from most other scenes in that there tend to be a lot more actions, because action scenes tend to have a lot of things happening, especially things with significant results. Indeed, most conflicts tend to be a string of actions, one happening after another, in quick succession, often in response to the previous action. A Waker stomps down with a massive metal leg, a player character tries to dive out of the way, one of the other PCs fires at the Waker to draw its attention, and so forth, until the scene is resolved.

When a character attempts an action during a conflict, it's likely that the action they want to perform will fall into one of a few broad categories, at least in game terms. This applies as much to NPCs as it does to PCs.

There are, roughly speaking, four broad actions that characters will perform:

- **Attack:** the action's intent is to break, hurt, or otherwise defeat an opponent. This is a decisive action, and one which cannot be undone.

- **Avoid Danger:** the action's intent is to avoid or resist some dangerous or unfortunate action or event. The consequences of one's own actions can't be avoided in this way, but the effects of others' actions can be.
- **Confront Problem:** the action's intent is to confront some obstacle, problem, or challenge within the scene.
- **Define Truth:** the action's intent is to alter some fact of the scene. This may be to remove or change a Truth that is currently in play, or it may be to introduce a new Truth to the situation.

When an action scene begins, the GM should take a moment to establish the situation. This is a matter of describing what the player characters can see around them, what other characters are present (if they're visible — obviously, characters who are hidden shouldn't be described yet), and what's happening at the time. It's also useful to ask one of the players how the group got to the current scene, and maybe to roll a Test to see how successful they were: if they're sneaking in, success means they entered the scene unnoticed, while failure means they've drawn unwanted attention, and complications might mean they were delayed or suffered some other mishap on the way. This initial Test is a useful way to get things moving as the scene begins.

Once the scene has started, play carries on as normal: the GM describes the situation, the players describe what they want to do, the GM describes what happens as a result, and repeat until the scene ends. In a conflict, though, there will often be active opponents to the PCs' actions, and environmental threats and similar problems that get worse as the scene goes on.

So, each time a player character completes an action, whether they succeeded or failed, the GM takes an action of their own. There are several possibilities, most of which are natural results of the way a PC's action is resolved.

Failure and complications naturally lead into GM actions, while a successful PC action is likely to prompt a response or retaliation from adversaries, for example.

The actions listed here are suggestions of the kinds of things a GM can do with their actions. They're divided into two rough categories: **simple actions**, and **serious actions**. Simple actions occur more often, and their effects are not too severe, while serious actions tend to have serious consequences. It's often useful to use a simple action to 'announce' or foreshadow a serious action, and then give a PC a chance to avoid or prevent it; if they fail, the serious action goes ahead.

Simple Actions: any of the following actions marked with a * should also cost the GM 1 Threat.

- An adversary takes an action (such as an attack, or an action in their stat blockstatblock).
- Something or someone the PCs care about is vulnerable to danger.
- One of the PCs, or a friend or ally, is separated from the group*.
- An adversary reveals some hidden advantage or secret ability*.
- A new adversary or peril is revealed*.
- Foreshadow some future danger.
- A PC needs to make a difficult choice, or to compromise in some way.
- An existing peril gets worse in some way.

Serious Actions: any of the following actions marked with a * should cost the GM 2 Threat.

- An adversary uses an action, and automatically succeeds!
- A PC, or a friend or ally, suffers an Injury*.
- A PC loses something valuable*.
- An adversary uses an advantage or ability they've revealed.
- A new adversary or peril appears suddenly and then takes an action*.

Crucially, these actions should reflect the way events in the game are unfolding and make sense in the ongoing narrative; a GM action shouldn't happen out of nowhere, but rather should be a logical part of the actions that have already occurred and the situation currently happening.

It's also useful to remember that the GM's actions are not necessarily limited to the NPCs present in a scene: the environment or situation can be central to many actions, particularly where the terrain is precarious or the situation is worsening. A collapsing ruin may be a source of GM actions, as may a raging fire, or rising flood. Similarly, there's no requirement that all characters — PCs and NPCs alike — in a scene perform the same number of actions: if the narrative supports an NPC or a PC taking two actions in quick succession, or multiple actions spread over time, that's fine, so long as none of the players in the group feel like they're being ignored or overlooked.

If you're using the optional Action Order rules, every character receives an action of their own, in a specific order. This is a more structured way to play, and it may be more comfortable for groups who prefer that kind of structure and order to their games. In this case, it may still be useful to set aside an extra turn for an environmental hazard or worsening condition. Each round, when that turn arrives, the hazard or situation worsens, giving the GM a specific opportunity to spend Threat or resolve the effects of those hazards against other characters present.

SPIRIT ECONOMY

The most valuable resource the player characters possess is **Spirit**, which represents a mixture of a character's stamina, their determination, and their belief in their own ability and those of their friends. In game terms, Spirit is a major factor in whether or not characters succeed at Skill Tests — as it can be used to purchase extra d20s, or to re-roll them — but also surviving the perils and dangers of Evera Prime, by allowing a player character to avoid injuries.

However, player characters don't have a huge supply of Spirit, so each player must strike their preferred balance between using enough to succeed immediately, keeping enough in reserve for later challenges, and holding some back to survive Injury or mishap. Fortunately, there are a number of ways to recover spent Spirit, both during and after action scenes. Rest is one such way, and giving the player characters opportunities to stop and recover from the stress and danger of adventuring is vital. Beyond that, PCs can recover Spirit through spending Momentum and adding to Threat, even during the midst of battle, drawing vigor and resolve from success and the aid of allies, or from the desperation of the moment.

While managing how much Spirit they spend and how much they recover is largely left to the players to figure out, it is something the GM should be aware of, especially when running the game for newer players who haven't yet gotten to grips with how to use Spirit. The following are a few useful tips for gamemasters that relate to the player characters' Spirit.

- **Rest:** Under most circumstances, let the player characters rest after an action scene, even if it's only a Breather (5 minute rest). If it seems like the amount of time the players want to rest is too long, the GM can add to Threat (2 for a Break rest, 4 for Bed rest), to represent problems and situations getting worse while the player characters sit idle. When adding to Threat in this way, always announce the Threat cost and let the players consider whether the action is worth the cost.
- **Teamwork:** A group that works well together can often use Spirit more frequently and in larger amounts, relying on one another to replenish their Spirit by spending Momentum during the course of their adventures. Cooperative bonds and certain talents can help a character generate Spirit for their allies more efficiently, getting more Spirit for each Momentum spent. When a group cooperates and works as a team, they can face challenges much greater than they would have been able to face alone.
- **Desperation:** A player character can buy back some Spirit by adding to Threat. This isn't likely to be used often by the players, as Threat can be used to make later scenes more difficult or dangerous, but it's a valuable option when nothing else presents itself. Characters with rivalry bonds particularly benefit from this option: a character gains 1 Spirit each time their rival buys Spirit by adding to Threat. When all else seems lost, these kinds of calculated risks can pay off. When players use this option, it's advisable not to spend the Threat gained too quickly, as it may feel like the players are being punished.
- **Exhaustion and Growth:** A character becomes exhausted when they've run out of Spirit. This can be a severe hindrance if it happens in the midst of an action scene, and an exhausted character can't regain Spirit on their own without resting (an ally can help an exhausted character recover, though). However, exhaustion isn't necessarily a bad thing: while it shows that player characters have been pushed to their limit, a character who has become exhausted also gains **growth** (as does someone who helps an exhausted character recover), so choosing to spend that last point of Spirit can often be a useful option for player characters in a desperate situation.
- **Pacing:** In general, think about how the adventure is going, and how it might be expected to go. If the players are having an easy time of things, making things more difficult so that players need to spend more Spirit may be advisable. Conversely, if players find themselves running low on Spirit, or even becoming exhausted, frequently, maybe give the players more opportunities to rest and recover, or make things a little easier. Of course, an easy adventure, or a difficult one, may be the intention, but it may be that an adventure has become too easy or too difficult accidentally, because of the way the dice have rolled.

You will have noted at this point that many of the rules in this section encourage players to help each other out. This is very deliberate! You should let your players know that they benefit from acting compassionately towards each other, and aiding each other, especially in the heat of combat. A group that supports each other is far stronger in ***Dreams and Machines*** than a group that does not.

SAFETY TOOLS

Evera is treacherous for the characters adventuring across it, often pushing them to their limits. Regardless of their *characters'* trials, it's important for *players* to have a fun, enjoyable, and safe game where they aren't made uncomfortable, traumatized, or targeted. One of the best ways to ensure everyone has a good time is by using safety tools.

Some general things which can help include providing an inclusive, accessible table, maintaining open dialogue, not attempting to use games as therapy, and respecting player boundaries, identities, and access needs without invasive or probing questions. It's important to create a space where people are free to make their needs or hopes for the game known.

WHAT ARE SAFETY TOOLS?

Safety tools are a way to facilitate communication at the table. They are used before, during, and after game sessions to ensure everyone feels comfortable, is on the same page, and having a good time, and they provide strategies to handle when, for any reason, someone is not.

Safety tools require a baseline of respect and trust, and group agreement that the wellbeing of everyone at the table vastly outweighs anything happening in-game. The GM should make clear that safety tools and personal boundaries are something you take seriously, with consequences up to and including removal from the game for anyone failing to respect them. People need to feel safe enough to share personal concerns or boundaries and trust it won't be used against them. The GM needs to set that tone.

Stay safe and sound

WHY USE SAFETY TOOLS? ??????????????

Safety tools allow GMs to tell stories while feeling confident everyone is on board. Firstly, particularly in games with intense elements or themes, safety tools allow everyone to react while differentiating between emotionally heightened roleplay and anyone's *actual* distress.

Next, ensuring everyone has a clear way to express their boundaries before, during, or after a game creates a common understanding of the type of story being told together, along with ways to clearly express any needs.

Finally, no matter how well a group knows each other, a player might have experiences or fears that others aren't aware of, or may be using gaming as a break from real-world events. It is important to have open communication and safety tools no matter whether a group has known each other for half an hour or half a century.

WHAT TO USE

Which safety tools are appropriate should be agreed with the gamemaster and all players. Some popular safety tools include:

- **Session 0** - A session 0 is important to lay out expectations between all players. This session is often used to make characters and for the gamemaster to give players a rough outline of what they have planned for the campaign. It also allows the GM to fill in players on any specific background elements they need to know. Finally, a session 0 should be used to go over anything players are not comfortable with including in the story. Roleplaying can be raw and emotionally charged, and players should not run into anything that could be a trigger for them without knowing about it beforehand. Clear communication beforehand is key.
- **Lines and Veils** (by Ron Edwards). During Session 0, or a similar pre-game meeting, players agree on content they want to veto or regulate in play. Lines are topics or story beats that should not appear in play at all, or even be alluded to. Veils instead apply to activities that can happen within the fiction, but not "on camera" — they can be referenced, but not described in any detail. Lines and Veils can be collected from each player anonymously, but the complete list should be presented somewhere visible to all players each session, for convenient reference.
- **The X-Card** (by John Stavropoulos). At the start of play, the gamemaster introduces a card with an X written on it, which any player can lift or tap at any time to indicate discomfort with the game's content for any reason. When that happens, the discomforting content is edited out of play. A player using an X-Card is never required to justify its use.
- **Post-Session Debriefs**. At the end of each session, before leaving the table, every player (including the gamemaster) is given an opportunity to describe something they enjoyed or found challenging about the session. If playing in a campaign, players could instead describe something they hope to do next session. As well as providing gamemasters with useful feedback, it gives players room to talk about events in the game they were troubled by, with confidence that their concerns will be listened to. If everything went well, that's a nice thing to celebrate too!

There are many other types of safety tools groups might prefer, and a bit of experimentation to find what works for everyone is worthwhile. Searching for "RPG Safety Tools" online should direct players to more options, and more detailed explanations of the safety tools summarized here.

The purpose of safety tools is not to provide blanket protection for every roleplaying session, but to ease the process of discussion when/if a problem arises in play. Introducing safety tools clearly demonstrates that every player's well-being takes priority over the game or the story, and that everyone is committed to respecting each other's limits. Whilst use of safety tools is especially important for games engaging with challenging, stressful, or emotional content, groups should consider adopting them for all game sessions as a sensible extra precaution.

AIDING PLAYER ADVANCEMENT

Much of character advancement is left in the hands of players, but that doesn't mean that the GM can't (or shouldn't) take some time to consider their role in giving players opportunities for their characters to grow.

As a reminder, player characters gain **growth** in the following ways:

- Every **Archetype** comes with a goal, which provides the character with an opportunity to gain **growth** when they resolve a problem or challenge in a particular way. The GM can encourage this by creating opportunities for the players to deal with problems in a way that fits their Archetype(s); a Fixer is unlikely to thrive if the only problems are solved by combat.

- Every **Temperament** comes with an **Attitude**, which provides the character with growth when they act in a particular way that causes problems for the group. There's no requirement for the player to inconvenience themselves like this, but it can be a fun extra source of growth.
- A character will have short-term and long-term ambitions that can earn them **growth**. As the GM, you should keep an eye on character ambitions and try to provide chances for the players to pursue these personal goals. A short-term ambition should be the kind of thing that can be achieved within one or two adventures, and which might bring them closer to a long-term ambition. A long-term ambition is the biggest goal in a character's life.
- Characters gain **growth** when they face adversity, in any situation where you spend three or more Threat in one go. Naturally, this is up to the GM, but players can encourage it by providing Threat to spend, and creating situations like inflicting injuries on NPCs with a high damage rating, as that'll create situations for the GM to spend lots of Threat.
- A character gains **growth** when they overexert themselves and become exhausted, but also when they help an exhausted ally recover. This is very much under the players' control, but the GM can influence it by giving players difficult challenges and tough situations where spending a lot of Spirit is necessary.

CHAPTER 5

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Helpful friends and annoying enemies!

TYPES OF NPCS

Non-player characters are categorized by a combination of their significance to the adventure, and their power, as well as their relationship with the player characters.

Adversaries are NPCs who oppose the player characters, often because they are affiliated with opposing factions.

BOO

Allies are NPCs who work with or for the player characters. Players can often take direct control of NPCs in situations where their normal player character is absent or busy elsewhere.

Bystanders are NPCs who are neither opposed to or aligned with the player characters, and who are just trying to get on with their lives.

NPCs do not have Spirit. Rather, they can spend Threat from the GM's pool in all the ways that the PCs can spend Spirit, including to avoid attacks. An NPC cannot spend Threat to avoid an attack if they have less than the amount needed. Some NPCs — including all Major NPCs — have a personal Threat pool that they alone can spend.

With an allied NPC — one *currently* helping the player characters — any situation where they would spend Threat, they add an equivalent amount to Threat instead. Allied NPCs with a personal Threat pool spend points from that as normal, but must otherwise add to Threat to use special abilities, buy extra dice, or avoid injuries, etc.

NORMAL NPCS

A Normal NPC is the most common type of NPC present in most scenes. The majority of NPCs encountered during any game will be Normal NPCs. This allows the GM to handle the majority of NPC actions and responses with a minimum of effort.

Normal NPCs have a single Truth, which is a simple description of who they are and what they do.

Normal NPCs have two attributes: a main attribute named for the NPC's Truth, and a second, lower attribute simply called "Default". Each of these attributes has an associated akill rating; this is normally 1 for the Default skill, and it is always lower than the main skill.

They will also list any weapons they are carrying, and any special actions they can perform.

Normal NPCs are defeated after suffering a single Injury, of any kind.

Normal NPCs will be listed in this format:

THRALL

THRALL		DEFAULT	
12	3	7	1

WEAPONS	ACTIONS
Hooked Spear (melee): *Impaled 2* **Barbed Javelin (ranged):** *Bleeding 2*	**Tomorrow's Problem:** The Thrall retreats from the fight and takes no further part in the scene. Add 1 to Threat.

RUNNING NORMAL NPCS

NPCs in ***Dreams & Machines*** are designed to be as simple to run as possible, because a gamemaster has a lot to deal with, especially during tense situations like action scenes.

Normal NPCs don't have the normal list of attributes and skills. Rather, they have an attribute and skill to cover their actions when they're doing the things they're good at doing, and a "default" attribute and skill for when they're doing anything else. The main attribute will be named for the NPC's Truth.

It is left to the GM's judgment what activities a given NPC should be "good at", but this shouldn't be something to agonize over — if it makes sense that an NPC would be good at, say, making a melee attack, or jumping over a chasm, or whatever, go with whatever feels right.

Using the Thrall NPC profile as an example, a Thrall is likely to be good at fighting, hunting, and sneaking, so they'd use their Thrall attribute and skill on their Skill Tests for those activities. By comparison, a River Trader might use their River Trader attribute and skill for things like haggling and negotiating, and for piloting their boat through rough waters, but they would probably use their Defaults for fighting or searching the ruins for hazards.

CREATING A NORMAL NPC

The main details to consider when creating a Normal NPC are the attributes and skills. These can be determined by comparing ratings to the desired level of competence.

Select a Competence level for the NPC at their main area of expertise — this determines their ratings for their main attribute and skill. Then, select a lower level of Competence, and use that to determine the ratings for the NPC's default attribute and skill.

NPC COMPETENCE	ATTRIBUTE	SKILL
Basic	7–8	1
Proficient	9–10	2
Talented	11–12	3
Exceptional	13–14	4
Master	15–16	5

Equip the NPC with appropriate weapons (if any, not all NPCs will be armed). For NPCs with a "natural" form of attack (i.e., one from their own body, not from a weapon they carry), a rating equal to 1 lower than their main Skill, or equal to their main Skill if they're meant to be particularly deadly.

Many NPCs will have a special action they can perform, or a special ability that affects them. These can be created new, but there's a list of common abilities later in this chapter.

The majority of Normal NPCs will only have one such action or ability, for the sake of simplicity, though a more powerful, more important character may have more.

NPC GROUPS

From time to time, players may encounter several identical Normal NPCs acting as a group. These groups can make relatively insignificant foes more impactful as they rely on strength in numbers rather than individual prowess.

- **Group Action:** when a group of NPCs attempts a Test, one of the NPCs in the group leads the action, and the rest assist that leader.
- **Attacking a Group:** Attacks against groups are always normal Skill Tests, rather than contests. If a group is able to defend itself (such as from a melee attack that they are aware of, or from a ranged attack while in cover), the difficulty of the attack increases by +1 for every 2 NPCs in the group (i.e., attacking a group of 4 Thralls in melee would have a difficulty of 3). NPCs who receive this bonus may spend 2 points of Threat to counter-attack if an attack against them misses.
- **Defeating Groups:** when a group of NPCs is attacked, a single NPC in the group is hit by the attack, suffers an **Injury** and is thus **defeated** unless they spend Threat to avoid the Injury. The attacker may spend Momentum to hit additional NPCs in that group; every 2 Momentum spent hits one extra NPC. If the weapon has the **Burst** quality, it hits one extra NPC for every 1 Momentum spent instead.

MAJOR NPCS

Major NPCs are dedicated and resourceful characters, with powerful abilities and a considerable influence over their environment. Many Major NPCs are technological terrors or twisted monstrosities. They may be a leader or important personage amongst a group of Normal NPCs, or they may be a solitary adversary, able to threaten an entire group of player characters by themselves.

- **Truths:** A Major NPC has at least one Truth, which is a basic description of the NPC's role or purpose, such as *Thrall Technomancer, Deadly Machine*, or *Nanotech Construct*. They may also have a second trait reflecting some other relevant detail about them.
- **Attributes:** Major NPCs have the same four Attributes that PCs have: Might, Quickness, Insight, and Resolve.
- **Skills:** Major NPCs have the same Skills that PCs have: Move, Fight, Sneak, Talk, Operate, Study, and Survive.
- **Personal Threat:** All Major NPCs have a pool of Personal Threat, typically containing 3-6 points. The GM may spend this Threat on any actions or abilities the NPC has, including avoiding Injury.
- **Defeat:** A Major NPC must suffer several Injuries before they are defeated. This is normally equal to the number of Truths it has plus +1.
- **Special Abilities:** Major NPCs typically have 2-4 special abilities which affect the way the NPC functions, though not all of these will be positive.
- **Special Actions:** Major NPCs have a specific list of special actions they can perform. These include the NPC's attacks and weapons, and they will often be presented in a table allowing the actions the NPC takes to be determined randomly on a given turn. Each Major NPC has 4-6 actions.

Major NPCs will be listed in this format:

DECREPIT MEDIUM WAKER

PERSONAL THREAT:	DEFEAT:
5	2 INJURIES

Cumbersome Machine in Serious Disrepair

MIGHT	QUICKNESS	INSIGHT	RESOLVE
12	8	6	10

MOVE	FIGHT	SNEAK	TALK	OPERATE	STUDY	SURVIVE
3	4	1	1	3	2	2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Armor Plating: Protection 4 (reduced to 2 vs *Breaker* attacks).

Big and Slow: Reduce the difficulty of ranged attacks against this NPC by 1.

Decrepit: Suffers complications on a 19 or 20, gaining a *malfunction* Truth on its next turn.

Threatening: The Waker adds +1 to Threat each time it takes an action.

Solitary: The NPC may take more than one turn each round, but each turn after the first costs Threat: the first extra turn costs 1 Threat, the second costs 2, and so forth

ACTION	D20 ROLL	DESCRIPTION
Crush	1–4	The machine grinds forwards, seeking to trample and crush an enemy. It moves towards one enemy and makes a melee attack against them. **Might (Fight):** 12 (4) **Crushing Bulk:** Melee Attack, *Crushed 4*
Plasma Blast	5–8	The machine pivots, tracking a target, and then opens fire with its cannon. It makes a ranged attack against one enemy it can see. **Quickness (Fight):** 8 (4) **Damaged Plasma Cannon:** Ranged Attack, *Plasma Burn 3*, Breaker
Missile Salvo	9–12	The machine locks onto a single enemy and unleashes a missile against them. It does not move this turn. Spend 1, 2, or 3 Threat and choose an enemy in a different zone. That enemy must pass a **Quickness (Move)** Test with a difficulty equal to the Threat spent or be hit by the missile. **Missile Launcher:** Ranged Attack, *Shrapnel 4*, Long Ranged, Loud
Defend	13–16	The machine withdraws into itself, extending armor plates and other countermeasures. The machine gains +2 Protection until next turn, and it counters any failed melee attack against it with the Electro-Defence Field for free. **Electro-Defence Field:** Melee Attack, *Shocked 2*
Self-Repair	17–20	The machine pauses, activating diagnostics and self-repair protocols. It makes a **Resolve (Operate)** Test with a Difficulty of 2 to remove any one hindering Truth affecting it. **Resolve (Operate):** 10 (3)

COMMON NPC SPECIAL ABILITIES AND ACTIONS

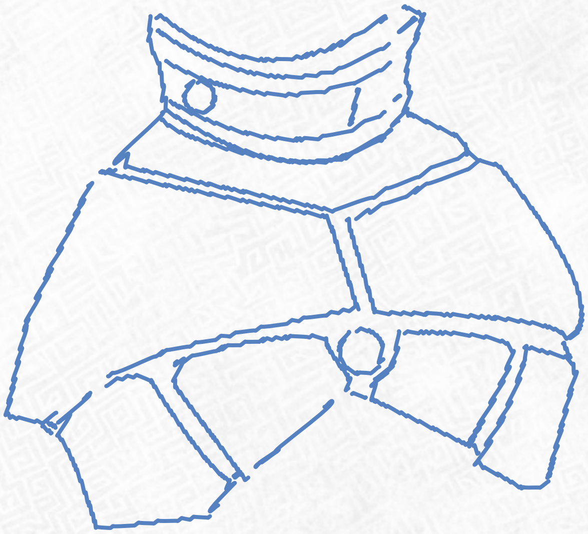
SPECIAL ABILITIES

ARMORED

The NPC has a Protection rating, reducing the amount of Threat it must spend to avoid Injury. This Protection rating is halved by attacks with the *Breaker* quality.

THREATENING

The NPC is especially dangerous, and the situation will only get worse while they are present. The NPC adds +1 to Threat at the start of each of its actions.



I'm glad that I have armor too

INCORPOREAL

The NPC's form is not solid, but a collection of nanites and projected kinetic fields. Any attack which does not inflict a *Shocked* Injury counts as inflicting an Injury of *Disrupted* 1.

SWIFT

The NPC is quick and maneuverable. When this NPC takes an action, it may spend 1 Threat to move one extra zone before or after its action.

DECREPIT

The NPC is damaged or malfunctioning, and suffers complications on a 19 or 20, gaining a *malfunction* Truth on its next turn if a complication is rolled.

BIG AND SLOW

The NPC is especially large and slow-moving. Reduce the difficulty of ranged attacks against this NPC by 1.

SOLITARY

The NPC typically operates alone, often against numerous foes. It may take more than one turn each round, but each turn after the first costs Threat: the first extra turn costs 1 Threat, the second costs 2, and so forth.

ACTIONS

AMBUSH

May only attempt while hidden. The NPC emerges from the shadows in a zone of its choosing and makes a melee attack. The target cannot defend against this attack. The melee attack is made with a weapon chosen when this action is added to an NPC.

DEFEND

The NPC adopts a defensive stance. Until the start of its next turn, the NPC either gains +2 Protection or increases the difficulty of attacks against it by +1 (choose when adding this action to an NPC). In addition, it may counter-attack against failed melee attacks for free using a melee weapon chosen when this action is added to an NPC.

HUNT

The NPC carefully observes its surroundings and watches its enemies. Make a difficulty 0 **Insight** (**Study**) Test. Any successes are immediately converted to Threat.

LURK

The NPC moves slowly and cautiously, preparing to strike. Spend 1 Threat while the NPC is in darkness or otherwise has cover or concealment. The NPC is hidden: remove their token from its current zone. PCs must succeed at an **Insight** (**Sneak**) Test contested by the NPC's **Quickness** (**Sneak**) Test to locate it. When located, place the NPC in any zone.

MELEE ATTACK

The NPC makes a melee attack with the chosen melee weapon.

POUNCE

When the NPC moves to an enemy and makes a melee attack, spend 1 Threat to Pounce. If the attack is successful, the target gains a *knocked prone* Truth.

RANGED ATTACK

The NPC makes a ranged attack with the chosen ranged weapon.

RECHARGE

The NPC draws power from an internal source. If the NPC's Powered weapon has discharged, it is now recharged.

RETREAT

The NPC retreats from battle. The NPC takes no further part in this scene. Add X to Threat where X is the number of Injuries the NPC can withstand before being **defeated**.

SELF-REPAIR

The machine pauses, activating diagnostics and self-repair protocols. It makes a **Resolve** (**Operate**) Test with a Difficulty of 2 to remove any one hindering Truth affecting it.

FLORA, FAUNA, AND MUTANT CREATURES

This section includes example statblocks and descriptions of many common foes on Evera Prime. Many of these are mutated creatures, either created by various villains, or creatures that have fallen prey to the various fallouts of the Builder War. Some are Wakers, while others represent lifeforms native to Evera Prime.

Yippyyyy My speciality!!!

AKRITI

NOMADIC PLANT		DEFAULT	
10	2	6	1

WEAPONS

Whipping Branches (melee): *Slashing 2*

ACTIONS

Trample (group only): Spend 2 Threat when the Akriti group moves and makes a melee attack; the attack inflicts two Injuries instead of 1.

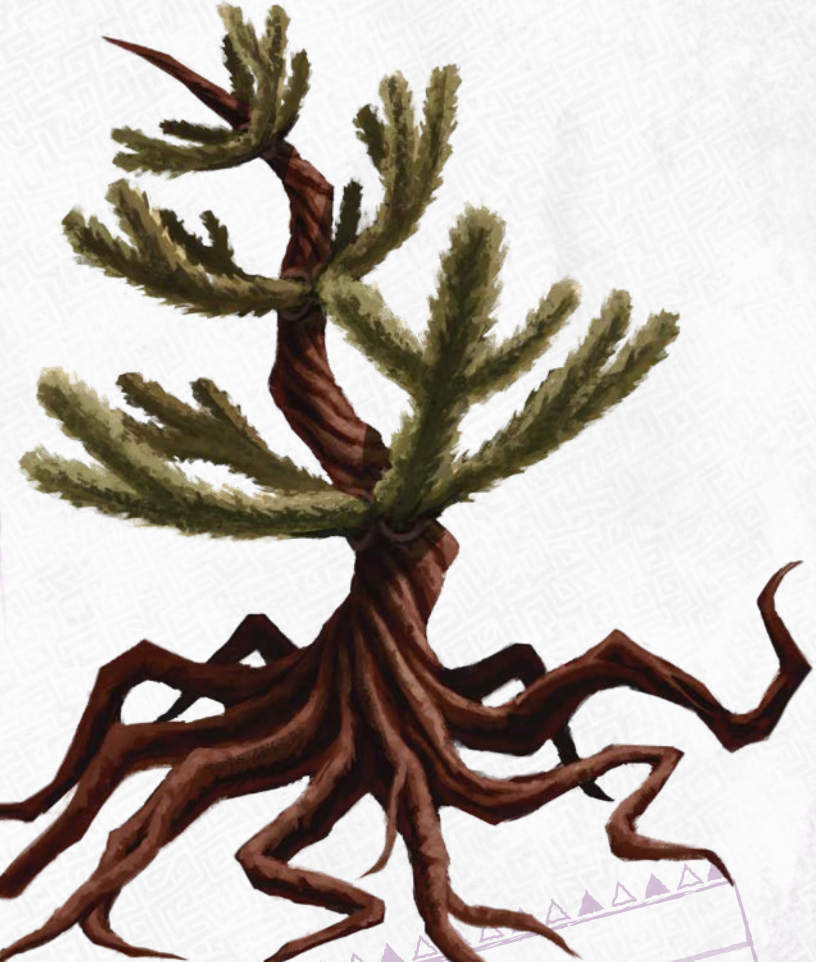
SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (reduced to 1 vs *Breaker* attacks)

Roaming Forest: When this NPC is part of a group, increase the damage rating of its attack by +1 for every 2 NPCs in the group. Further, any non-Akriti in the same zone as a group of Akriti add +1 to the difficulty of any Skill Tests they attempt.

AKRITI

Standing nearly twice the height of a human, these unusual plants are a species of small tree native to Evera Prime, known to migrate across their 'rooting grounds' in vast, thousands-strong herds. Sharp branches slash around to repel or overwhelm any who would impede their movement, while long masses of roots delve swiftly and deeply into the dirt to draw up nutrients whenever the Akriti stop.



BARG

HUGE MUTATED BEAST		DEFAULT	
11	3	7	1

WEAPONS

Goring Tusks (melee): *Impaled* 3

ACTIONS

Trample: Spend 2 Threat when the Barg moves and makes a melee attack; the attack inflicts two Injuries instead of 1.

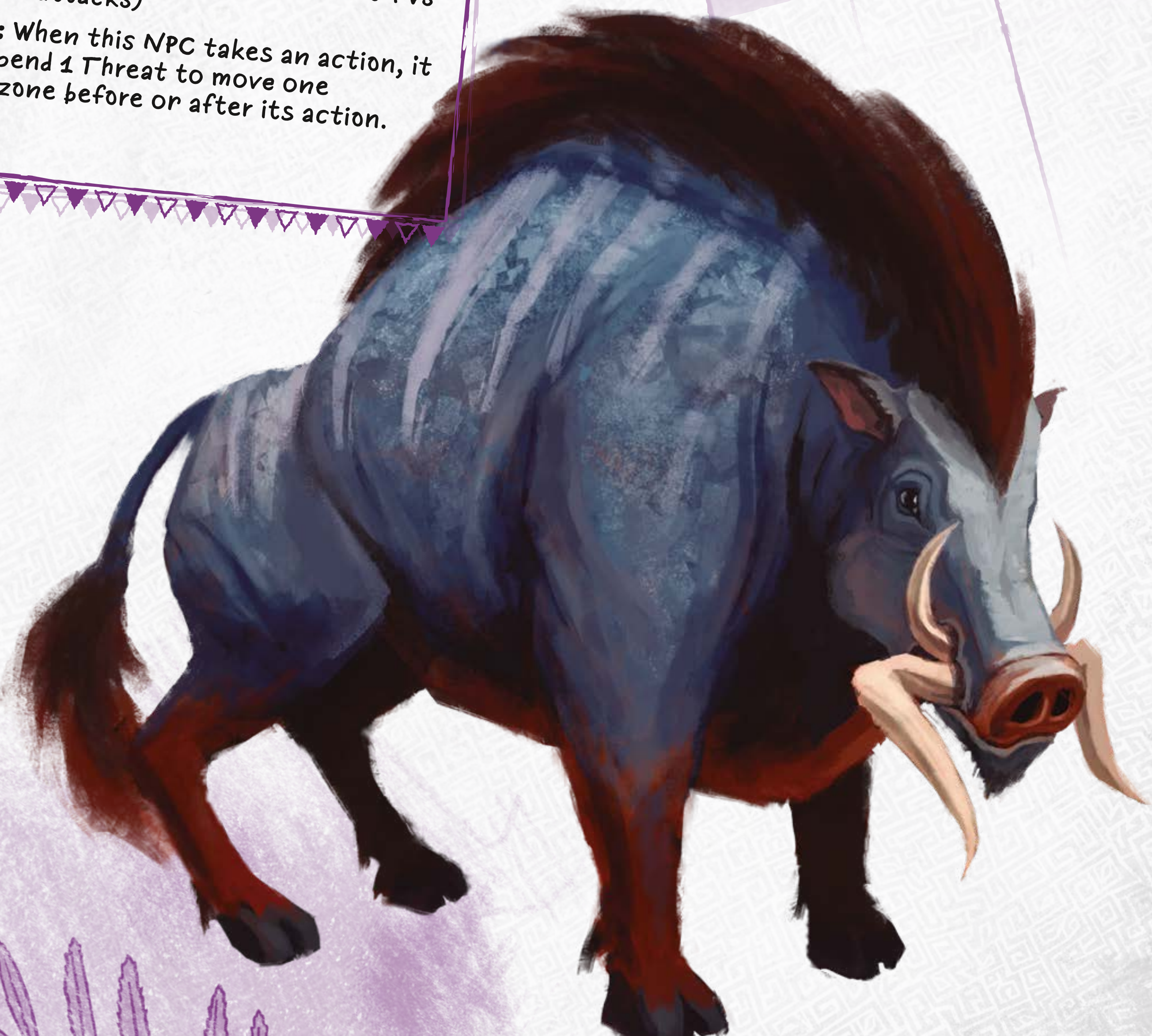
SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (reduced to 1 vs *Breaker* attacks)

Swift: When this NPC takes an action, it may spend 1 Threat to move one extra zone before or after its action.

BARG

A large, heavily mutated boar or wild pig, a Barg stands taller than a grown man at the shoulder, and nearly twice that in length. Their thick hides render them impervious to many forms of attack, and their aggression and surprising speed make them extremely dangerous to encounter. They are often "tamed" and used as mounts and beasts of burden by Thrall raiding parties, though how remains a mystery.



CRYPTID

HUGE MUTATED ARACHNID		DEFAULT	
11	3	7	1

WEAPONS

Envenomed Bite (melee): *Paralyzed* 3

ACTIONS

Stun-flash: Spend 1, 2, or 3 Threat to daze an enemy in the same zone. The enemy must pass a **Quickness (Survive)** Test with a difficulty equal to the Threat spent, or be unable to defend themselves against attack until the end of the Cryptid's next action.

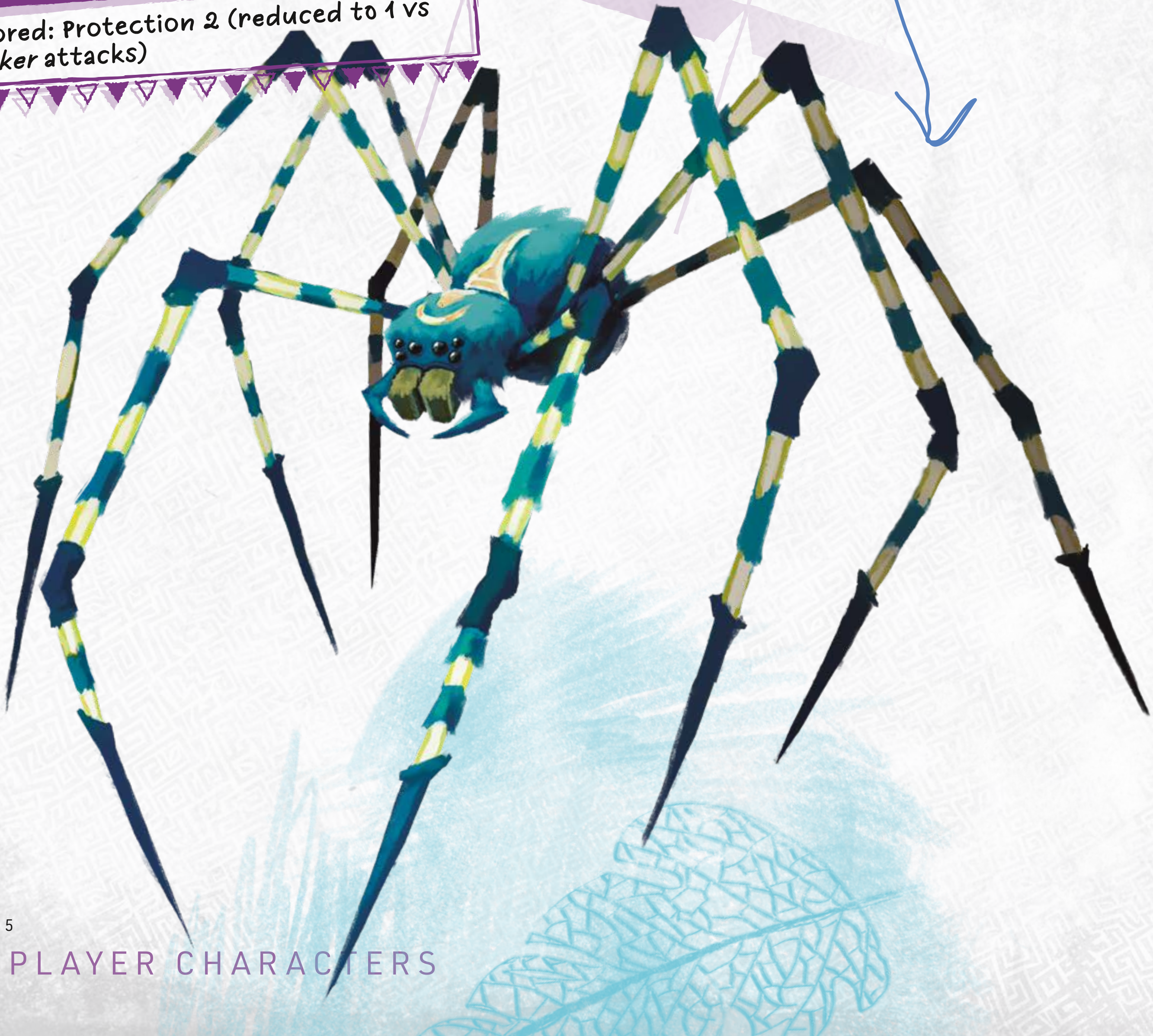
SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (reduced to 1 vs *Breaker* attacks)

CRIPTID

A mutated arachnid, typically found in dark caves, deep forests, unpowered ruins, and other lightless locations. Far too large to rely on webs to hunt, their bodies have adapted to their gloomy hunting grounds, becoming bio-luminescent. This is not only used as a lure, as they are able to generate a blinding flash of light to stun nearby prey as well.

Eight legs is too many legs!!!



HORSE

BEAST OF BURDEN		DEFAULT	
10	2	7	1

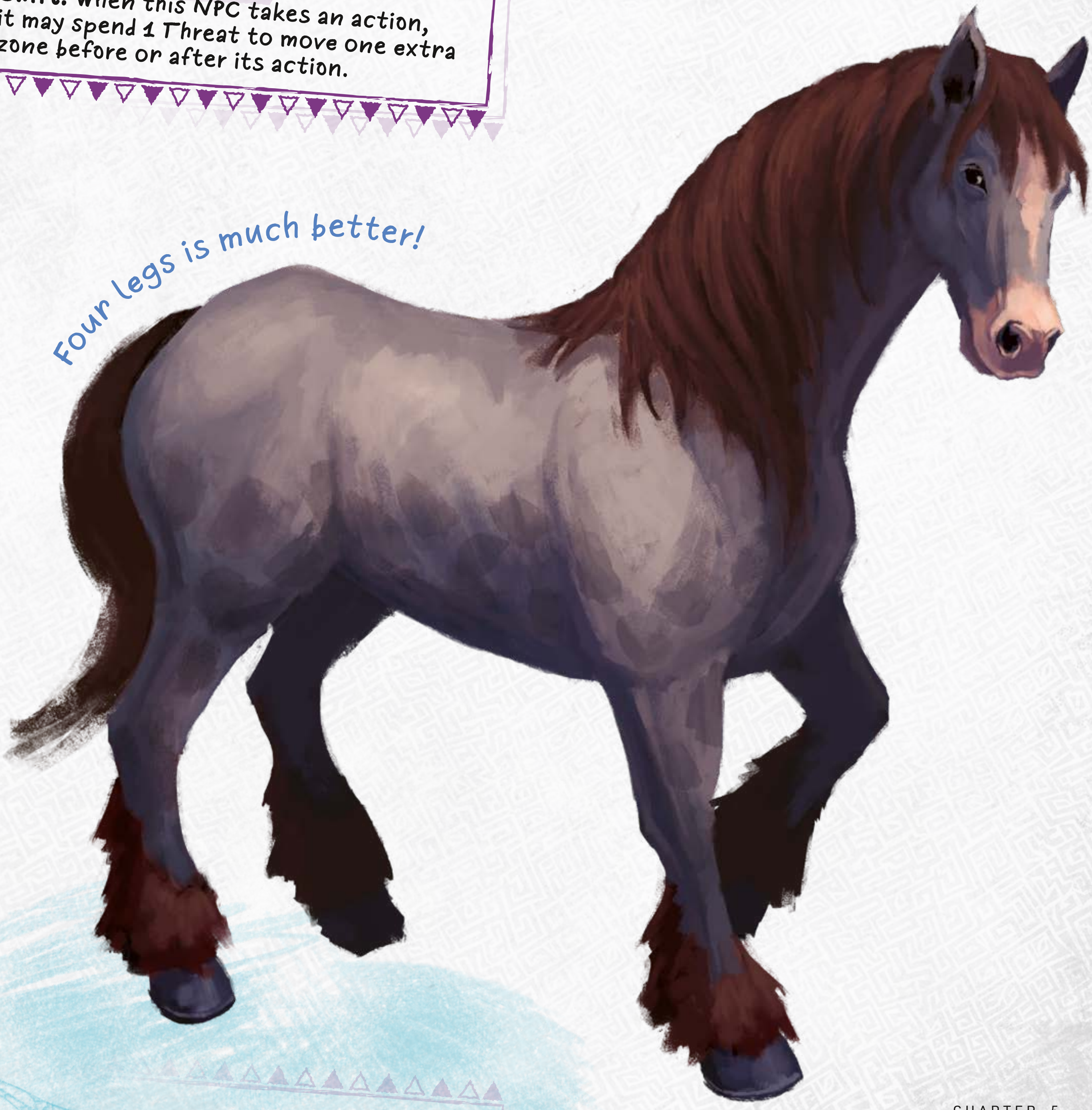
WEAPONS	ACTIONS
Hooves (melee): *Trampled* 3	None

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Swift: When this NPC takes an action, it may spend 1 Threat to move one extra zone before or after its action.

HORSE

More or less the same as the horses on Earth today, it isn't uncommon to find breeds of horse which are mutated or adapted to be stronger, faster runners, to jump longer distances, or to swim faster. Different breeds obviously serve different roles better, but horses are widely used by Dreamer and Everan communities as beasts of burden and as riding animals.



Four legs is much better!

MANYLEGS

As the name suggests, a Manylegs is a many-legged creature, similar to a centipede or millipede, only significantly larger – small examples are the length of a grown man's leg, and some may be almost as long as a person is tall. These creatures are extremely venomous, and able to deliver their toxins by bite or by spitting a spray of venom.

Far far far toooooooo...

MANYLEGS

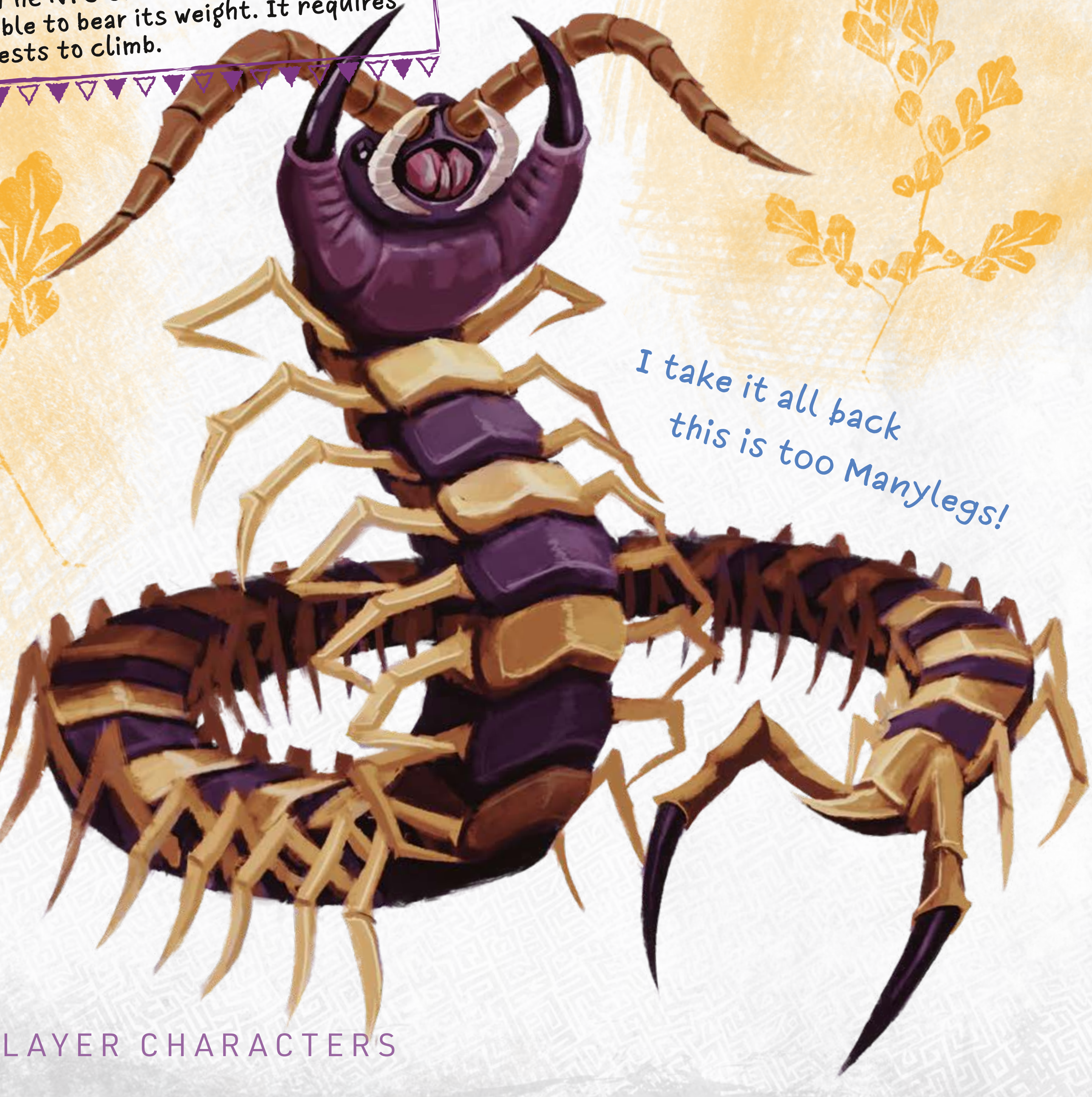
LARGE MUTANT INVERTEBRATE		DEFAULT	
11	3	8	1

WEAPONS	ACTIONS
Envenomed Bite (melee): *Poisoned* 3 Venom Spit (ranged): *Poisoned* 2	None

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (reduced to 1 vs *Breaker* attacks)

Scuttle: The NPC can move on any hard surface able to bear its weight. It requires no Skill Tests to climb.



I take it all back
this is too Manylegs!

PROWLCAT

A form of mutated big cat, likely altered from a panther or leopard. In place of fur, their bodies are covered in overlapping plates, reminiscent of a carapace or scales. These provide protection from attacks, and form a sort of ablative armor when struck by high-energy attacks, which regrows over time. They're highly intelligent hunters, and sometimes found in the company of Spears, though this is more a relationship of mutual convenience rather than domestication.

PROWLCAT

MUTATED BIG CAT		DEFAULT	
13	4	7	1

WEAPONS

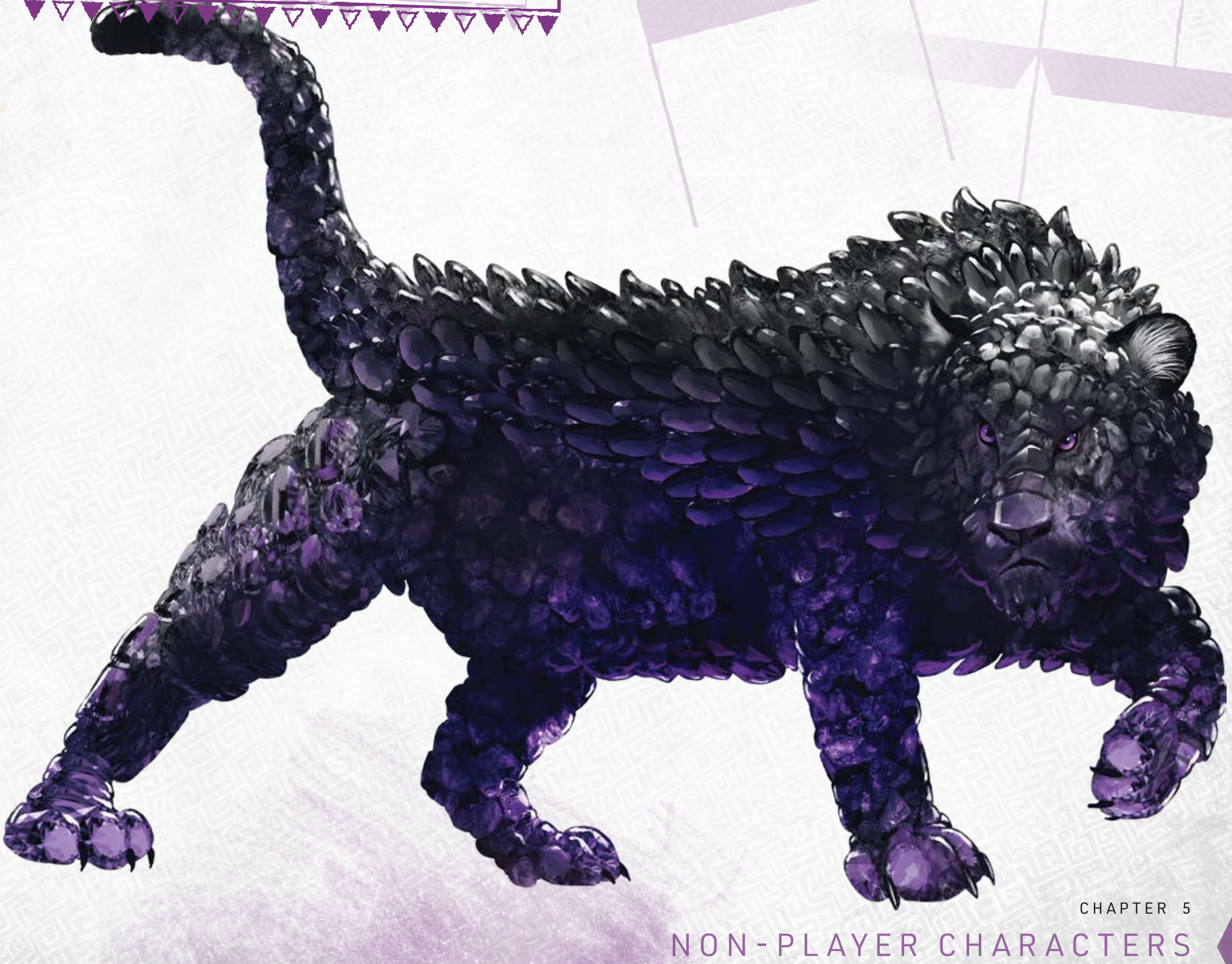
Teeth and Claws (melee): *Ripped* 3

ACTIONS

Pounce: When the Prowlcat moves to an enemy and makes an attack, spend 1 Threat to Pounce. If the attack is successful, the target gains a *knocked prone* Truth.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored Hide: Protection 2 (reduced to 1 vs Breaker attacks). +2 Protection against Ranged Attacks.



SNARLBACK

MUTATED WOLF		DEFAULT	
11	3	7	1

WEAPONS

Ripping Maw (melee): *Ripped 2*

ACTIONS

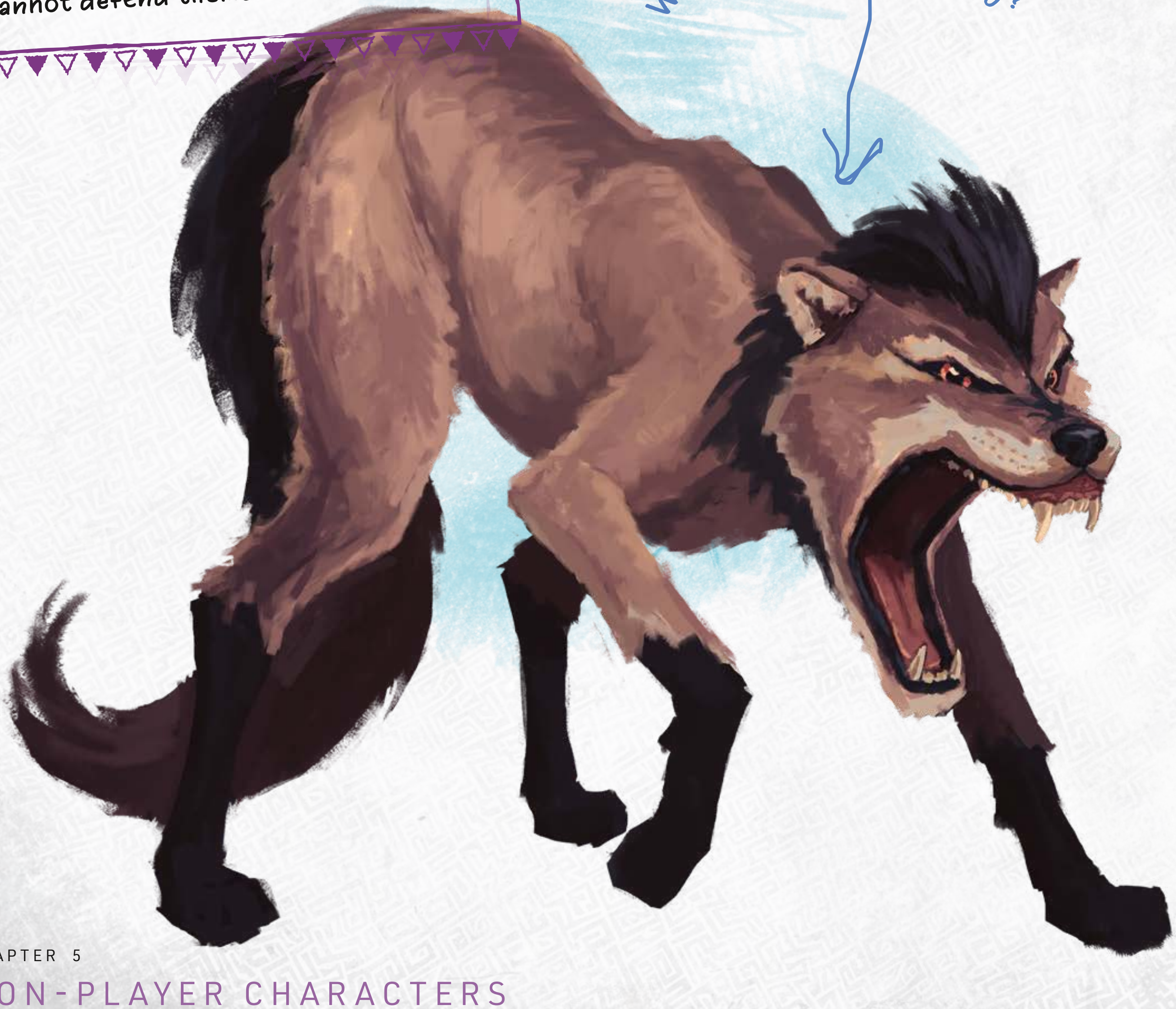
Savage: When the NPC attacks an enemy who is prone or otherwise unable to defend themselves, add +2 to the damage rating of the attack.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Pack Hunter: When making a melee attack as part of a group, the target enemy cannot defend themselves.

SNARLBACK

A compact breed of mutant wolf, Snarlbacks roam the wilderness in large packs, bringing down larger prey through ferocity and strength of numbers. Though smaller than a normal wolf, a Snarlback possesses a far larger mouth, and is able to distend its jaw to swallow far larger mouthful than it should be able to.



Why are they so angry?

WOLF HUNTER

A large canine breed – a hybrid of dog and wolf – which is widely domesticated by Everans, Dreamers, Spears, and other cultures, as companions, pets, and working animals.

WOLF HUNTER

MUTATED WOLF		DEFAULT	
11	3	8	1

WEAPONS

Claws and Teeth (melee): *Ripped 2*

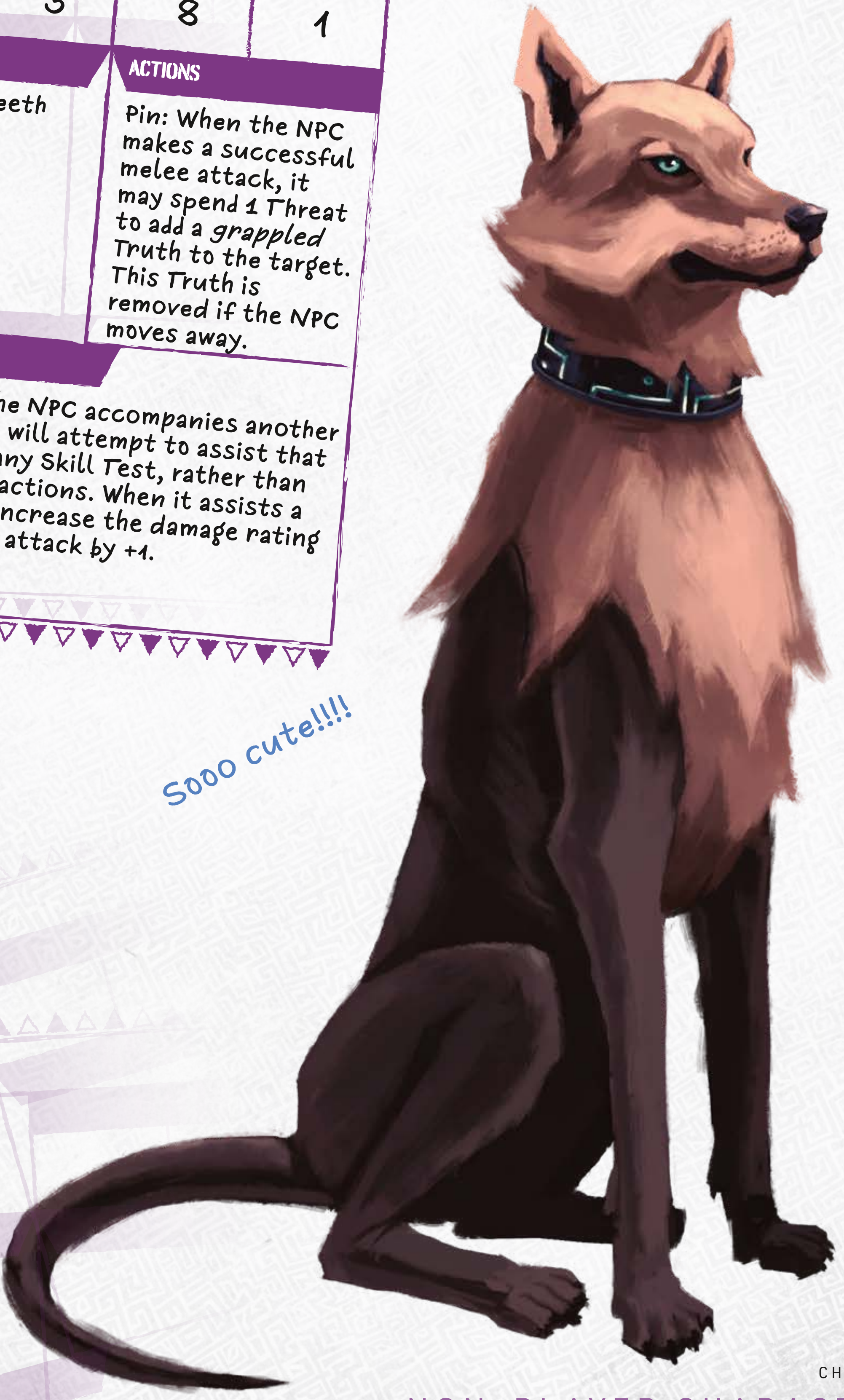
ACTIONS

Pin: When the NPC makes a successful melee attack, it may spend 1 Threat to add a *grappled* Truth to the target. This Truth is removed if the NPC moves away.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Companion: The NPC accompanies another character and will attempt to assist that character on any Skill Test, rather than taking its own actions. When it assists a melee attack, increase the damage rating of the assisted attack by +1.

Sooo cute!!!!



SHUFFLETAIL

A small carnivorous mammal, similar to a raccoon, Shuffletails typically seem innocuous and even benign from a distance, producing calming pheromones to calm other creatures. This behavior is often a ploy, luring in unsuspecting prey who may be unprepared for the Shuffletail's sudden and ferocious attack. With surprise and razor-sharp claws and fangs, a single Shuffletail can bring down prey several times its size.

SHUFFLETAIL

FERAL SCAVENGER		DEFAULT	
12	3	8	1

WEAPONS

Claws and Fangs (melee): *Ripped 2*

ACTIONS

Go for the Throat: When the NPC attacks an enemy who is surprised or otherwise unable to defend themselves, their attack gains the Breaker quality.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Innocuous: At the start of a scene, the NPC will appear to be harmless. Attacks against it increase in difficulty by +1. The first time it attacks, the attack cannot be defended against.

I'll keep out of the way
of these pulverizers!

FLAT TOP

A tough, aggressive herbivorous mammal, Flat Tops resemble large mountain goats, but for the way their skulls have thickened and hardened into a solid crest dotted with bony projections dense enough to pulverize rock. This crest is used against predators and rivals alike, but also to batter through obstacles in their path.

FLAT TOP

DENSELY-ARMORED GOAT		DEFAULT	
13	4	9	2

WEAPONS

Dense Skull (melee): *Battered 3*, Breaker

ACTIONS

Charge: When the NPC moves to an enemy and makes a melee attack, spend 1 Threat to Charge. If the attack is successful, the target gains a *Knocked Prone* truth.

Rockbreaker: The NPC spends its action ramming and battering a solid object or obstacle in its zone. Spend 2 Threat: the object or obstacle is broken.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 3 (reduced to 2 vs *Breaker* attacks)

SILENT SNAPPER

SWIFT PREDATORY REPTILE		DEFAULT	
14	4	10	2

WEAPONS	ACTIONS
Snapping Jaws (melee): *Crushed* 4 Rending Teeth (melee): *Ripped* 3 [x2], Breaker. This attack may only be attempted against enemies who are *grabbed*.	Snap Tight: When the NPC makes a melee attack with its Snapping Jaws attack, it may spend 1 Threat to inflict a *grabbed* Truth on the target. A *grabbed* enemy cannot move away from the NPC and cannot defend against melee attacks.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 3 (reduced to 2 vs *Breaker* attacks)

Swift: The NPC is quick and maneuverable. When this NPC takes an action, it may spend 1 Threat to move one extra zone before or after its action.

SILENT SNAPPER

Resembling a crocodile in a number of ways, these reptiles are adapted for greater speed and stealth. Their long legs allow them to cross land at considerable speed, yet making almost no noise, and the pattern of ridges and grooves on their backs help them avoid disturbing the water as they approach. Multiple layers of sharp, serrated teeth allow them to tear through flesh and bone with terrifying efficiency.

NANOGRAMS

A nanogram consists of a swarm of nanobots with a mixture of holoprojectors and energy field generators. When fully functioning, a nanogram may present itself as false terrain, colorful characters, vivid optical effects, depending on the circumstances, the underlying programming, and the situation. Nanograms vary considerably in scale, though it is often difficult to tell how "large" a nanogram system is, as any nanogram system can project holograms and other effects of any size. Their scale is more a matter of how widely-spread their projectors are and the size of the area they cover.

Nanograms are all round us!
ROARRR!

NANO-WISP

Small, rogue nanogram swarms, driven by corrupted, fragmented programming, can be found drifting around the ruins of the Old World. They flash and flicker with distorted optical projections and bursts of audio, like the tormented ghosts of old technology.

NANO-WISP

DAMAGED HOLOGRAM		DEFAULT	
9	2	8	1

WEAPONS

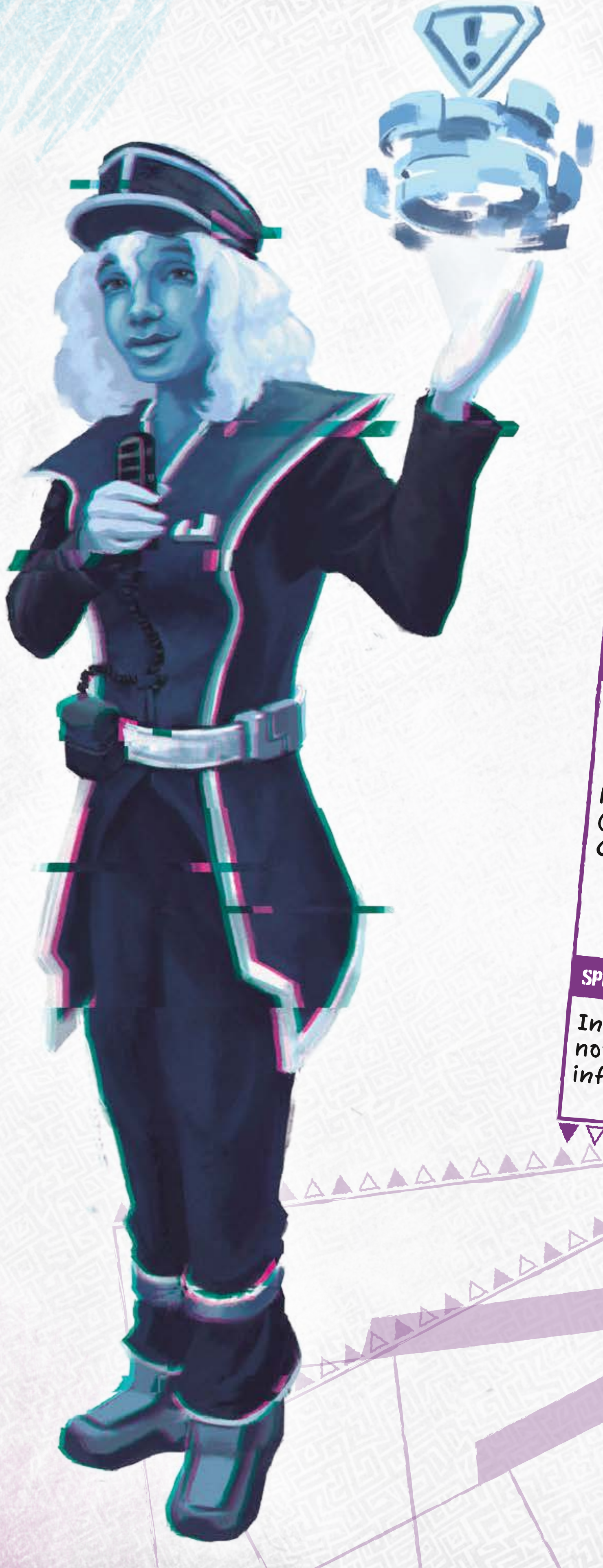
Static Discharge (melee): *Shocked 2*

ACTIONS

Flicker: The NPC's visible form flickers and vanishes for a few moments. It cannot be attacked until the start of next turn unless the attacker has a means of seeing data.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Incorporeal: Any attack which does not inflict a *Shocked* Injury counts as inflicting an Injury of *Disrupted 1*.



NANO-GEIST

Old nanogram systems once served a variety of roles considered too menial for people at the height of Everan civilization. They appeared in commercial roles, as waiters, receptionists, personal assistants, tour guides, public information providers, and so forth, presenting a benign face to deal with customers... but also appeared as sentries, police, and security guards, taking advantage of tireless machine vigilance and nonlethal armaments. While many were destroyed or shut down during the war, many more remain, lingering in the ruins, still attempting to carry out damaged instructions given by long-dead controllers.

NANO-GEIST

DAMAGED HOLOGRAM		DEFAULT	
10	3	8	1

WEAPONS

Static Discharge (melee): *Shocked* 3

Kinetic Pulse (ranged): *Concussed* 2

ACTIONS

Repel: The NPC may spend 1 Threat when they make a Kinetic Pulse ranged attack. If the attack hits, the target suffers a *knocked prone* Truth.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Incorporeal: Any attack which does not inflict a *Shocked* Injury counts as inflicting an Injury of *Disrupted* 1.

GENIUS

In some cases, a nanogram could be tethered to a mobile controller device, a compact computer system worn on the person, often around the wrist. This controller had a limited range, but a kinetic battery served as a power supply able to support a small nanogram swarm. This nanogram would serve as a personal assistant and companion, performing simple tasks like managing appointments, messages, information retrieval, and so forth, and serving as an extra pair of hands for simple tasks. These nanograms would often appear in the form of stylised holographic animals or exotic pets. These were known by many names, including familiars and tutelaries, but the common term name for them was "genius" – both to indicate the cleverness of these assistant programs, and from an ancient term for a guardian spirit that would watch over them.

GENIUS

DAMAGED HOLOGRAM		DEFAULT	
9	2	7	1

WEAPONS

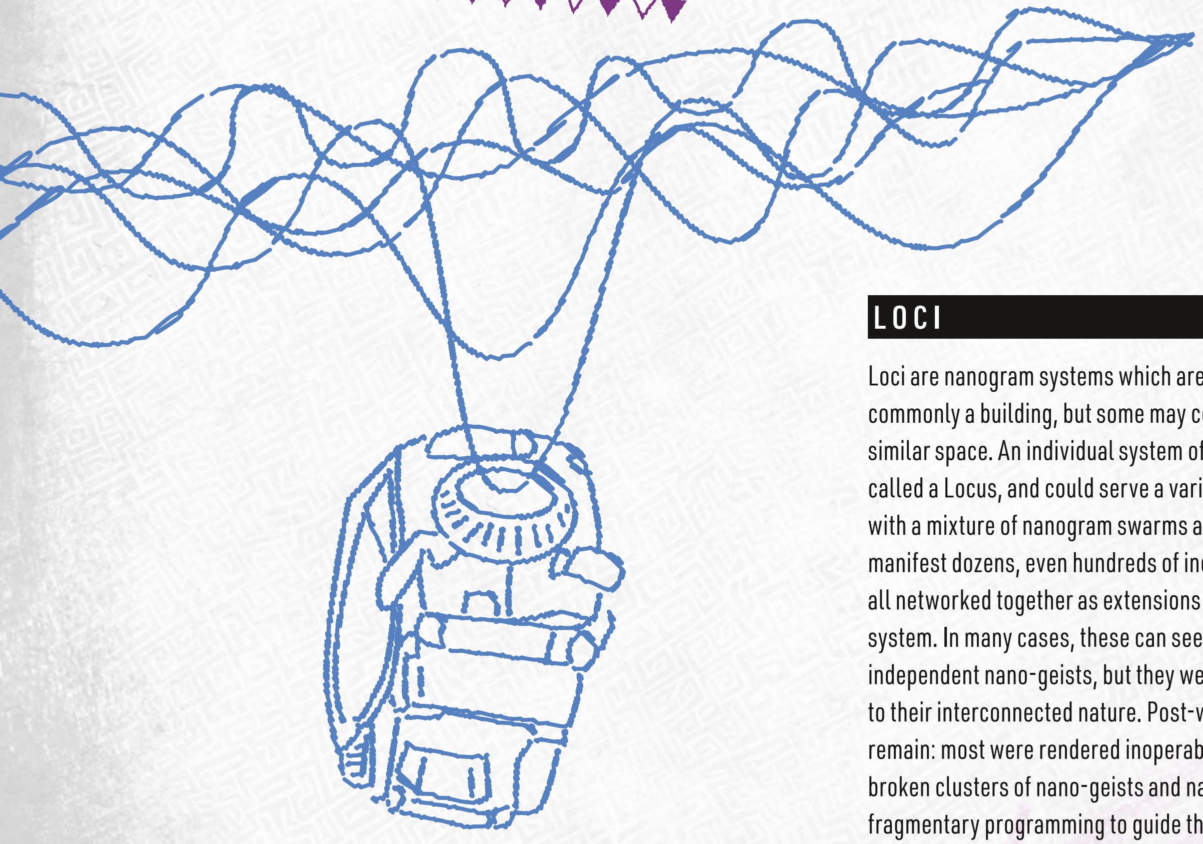
None

ACTIONS

Assistant: The NPC may assist any Insight-based Skill Test attempted by whomever possesses the NPC's controller device.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Incorporeal: Any attack which does not inflict a *Shocked* Injury counts as inflicting an Injury of Disrupted 1.



Nanogram Controller

LOCI

Loci are nanogram systems which are tied to a place – commonly a building, but some may cover a city district or similar space. An individual system of this sort is commonly called a Locus, and could serve a variety of different purposes, with a mixture of nanogram swarms and fixed projectors able to manifest dozens, even hundreds of individual nanogram forms, all networked together as extensions of a single computer system. In many cases, these can seem indistinguishable from independent nano-geists, but they were far more efficient due to their interconnected nature. Post-war, few of these systems remain: most were rendered inoperable, a few fractured into broken clusters of nano-geists and nano-wisps relying on fragmentary programming to guide them through half-forgotten procedures. The ones that remain are often still heavily damaged and functioning poorly.

LOCI NANOGRAM

PERSONAL THREAT:	DEFEAT:
6	3 INJURIES

MIGHT	QUICKNESS	INSIGHT	RESOLVE
6	12	8	10

MOVE	FIGHT	SNEAK	TALK	OPERATE	STUDY	SURVIVE
4	1	2	3	3	2	1

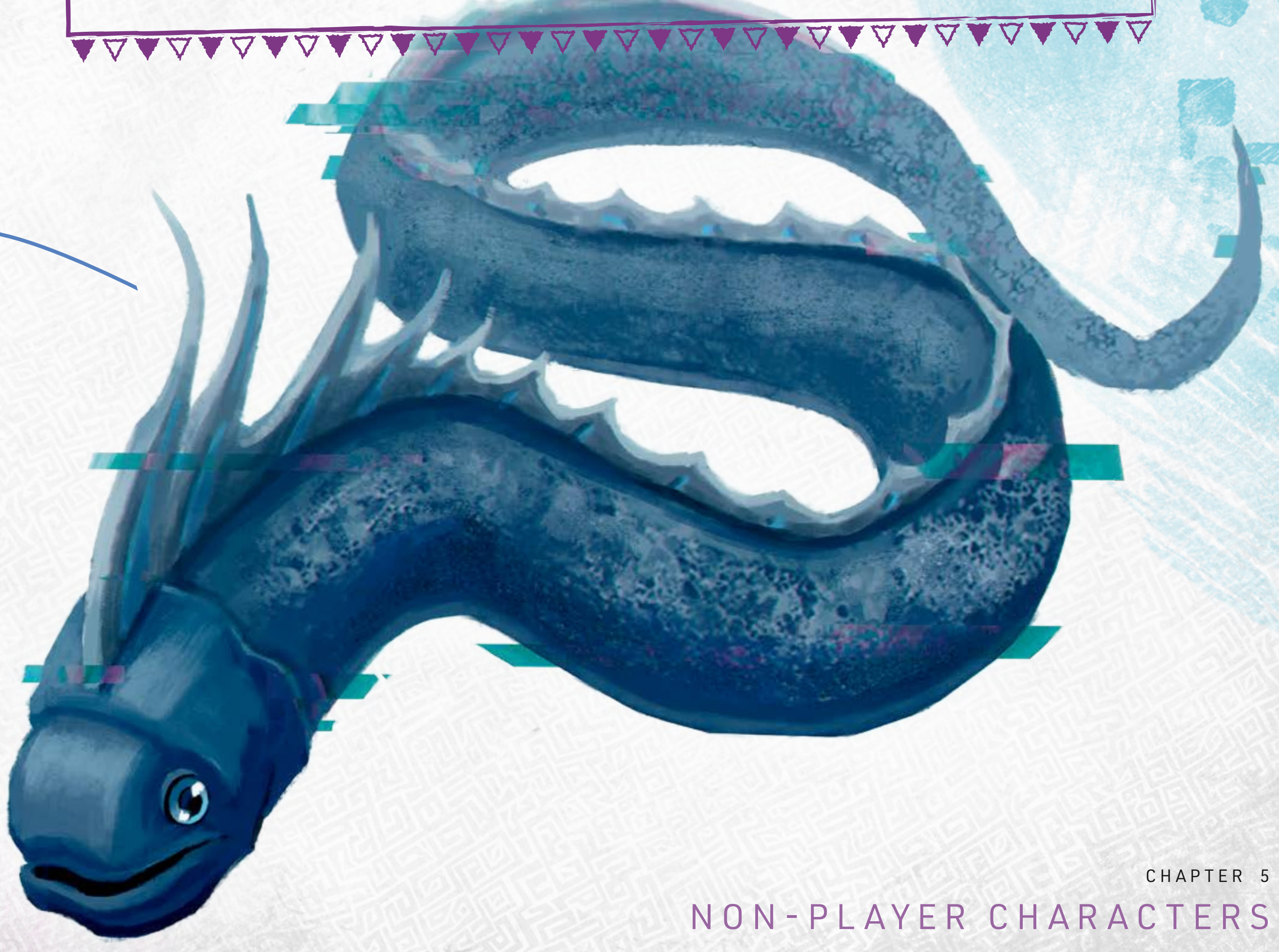
SPECIAL ABILITIES

Incorporeal: Any attack which does not inflict a Shocked Injury counts as inflicting an Injury of Disrupted 1.

Anywhere, Everywhere: The nanogram can move to any zone at the start of its turn. It may manifest in multiple zones at once: each physical presence (a person-sized hologram) after the first costs 1 Threat to create.

Diminishing: Each Injury the nanogram suffers adds +1 difficulty to any Skill Tests it attempts.

Solitary: The NPC may take more than one turn each round, but each turn after the first costs Threat: the first extra turn costs 1 Threat, the second costs 2, and so forth.



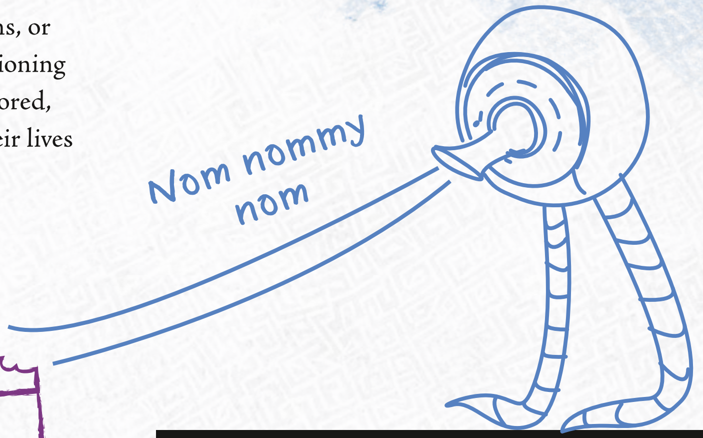
NANOGRAM ACTIONS

Nanograms are often programmed to manage safety and security in civilian buildings or facilities, preventing intruders from entering secure locations, organizing evacuations during emergencies, helping with queries and similar tasks.

ACTION	D20 ROLL	DESCRIPTION
Deterrent Pulse	1–4	The nanogram unleashes a blinding flash of light to discourage intruders. Select 1 or more enemies in a single zone and spend 1 Threat for each target. Those enemies must pass **Quickness (Survive)** Test with a Difficulty of 2 or suffer a *blinded* Truth on their next turn.
Repulser Shove	5–8	The nanogram generates a repulsive field that forces intruders back. Select a single enemy in the same zone as the NPC and make a melee attack. Injuries inflicted by this attack are temporary and are removed after the target's next turn. **Might (Fight)**: 6 (1) **Repulser Shove:** Melee, *Staggered* 2, Powered.
Disrupted	9–11	Take this action after the nanogram suffers an Injury from an attack. The nanogram briefly loses coherency and takes several seconds to reset itself. Remove one of the nanogram's physical presences. It takes no other actions this turn, but the Injury inflicted is removed unless it was a *Shocked* Injury.
Fire Suppression	12–14	The nanogram takes more extreme measures and activates the fire suppression system. Make a ranged attack. **Quickness (Fight):** 12 (1) **Fire Suppression:** Ranged, *Suffocated* 3, Powered
Taser Discharge	15–17	The nanogram takes more extreme measures and unleashes an electrical discharge. Make a melee attack. **Might (Fight)**: 6 (1) **Taser Discharge:** Melee, *Stunned 3*, Breaker, Powered.
Emergency Reboot	18–20	The nanogram pauses, activating diagnostics and self-repair protocols. It makes a **Resolve (Operate)** Test with a Difficulty of 2 to remove any one hindering Truth affecting it. **Resolve (Operate):** 10 (3)

ROBOTS

While Wakers are often the first thing many people think of when they imagine robots, there are a sizable selection of simpler machines that can be found across the landscape. Some can be found dormant in the ruins, or roaming the wilderness driven by crude, malfunctioning programming. Others have been salvaged and restored, functioning alongside ordinary people to make their lives easier, as was their original intention.



PHAGE POD

MATTER-EATING ROBOT		DEFAULT	
10	2	6	1

WEAPONS

Disassembler Mandibles (melee): *Flayed 2, Breaker*

ACTIONS

Devour: The NPC spends an action devouring a pile of materials, which may be a defeated robot or character. The NPC adds 1 to its Personal Threat.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (reduced to 1 vs *Breaker* attacks)

Salvage: The NPC, when defeated, contains Supply Points equal to the amount of Personal Threat it has accumulated. If the NPC is an ally, then these Supply Points can be retrieved during a rest, rather than by defeating the NPC.

PHAGE PODS

A Phage Pod will 'eat' just about anything, breaking down objects into raw materials that can be repurposed. This can make rogue phage pods dangerous – they tend to favour metals, plastics, ceramics, and other inorganic materials, but damaged programming can make them far less choosy. When working normally, they're an invaluable aid to those looking to salvage materials from the ruins. Phage Pods look like a large eye on two legs, in fact the eye is a matter converter that uses short range plasma bursts from small mandibles that emerge from the eye area to break down objects into raw materials. Supplies are deposited from time to time in piles. They can move quickly over most terrain, and their advanced sensors for detecting different materials make them useful scouts as well. Phage Pods can be controlled from a Lens if added properly with the right commands.

AGRI-PODS

Essentially a combination of different farming tools, able to plough, sow, irrigate, weed, and harvest a field of crops, a single Agri-Pod can perform the labor of several farmers. This either frees them up to perform other activities, or significantly expands how much the community can produce. An Agri-Pod often resembles a box or ball shaped machine on one or more wheels around the size of a cow. Harvested materials are left on the ground behind the pod, or enterprising farmers connect sleds to save them the work of collecting the harvest.

AGRI-POD

FARMING ROBOT		DEFAULT	
11	3	6	1

WEAPONS

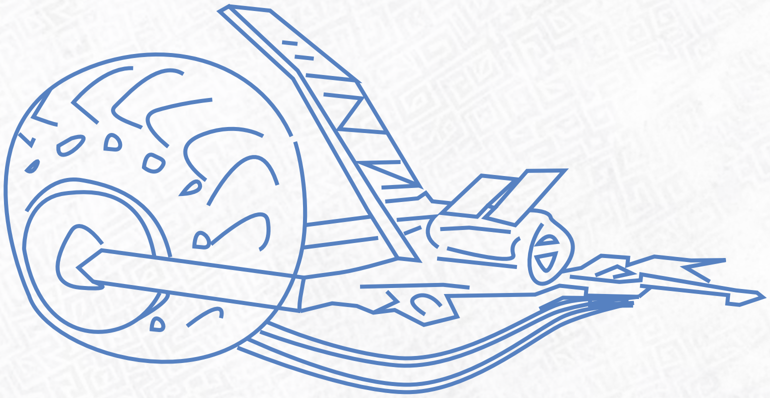
Farming Implements (melee): *Impaled* 3

ACTIONS

None

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (reduced to 1 vs Breaker attacks)



PEOPLE

EVERAN BANDIT

During lean times, desperate people can turn to banditry in order to keep themselves fed.

EVERAN BANDIT

DESPERATE EVERAN THIEF		DEFAULT	
11	3	7	1

WEAPONS	ACTIONS
Sword (melee): *Lacerated* 3 Hunting Pulser (ranged): *Burned* 3, Long-ranged, Powered	**Surprise Attack:** When attacking an enemy who has not yet acted in this combat, increase the damage rating of that attack by +2.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Ambusher: At the start of the combat, the NPC does not have to spend any Threat to take the first turn.

EVERAN MILITIA

Every Everan community maintains a small militia of Guardians, to protect against raiders, bandits, dangerous animals, and rampaging machines. They're not full-time soldiers, merely armed members of the community ready to take up their weapons during a crisis.

EVERAN MILITIA

ARMED EVERAN VILLAGER		DEFAULT	
10	2	8	1

WEAPONS	ACTIONS
Spear (melee): *Impale* 2 Spark Thrower (ranged): *Shocked* 3, Powered	None

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Home Guard: When defending against an attack, re-roll 1d20. In a group, add +1 to the difficulty of the enemy attack instead.

EVERAN TRADER

CANNY EVERAN MERCHANT		DEFAULT	
11	3	8	2

WEAPONS	ACTIONS
Dagger (melee): *Bleeding* 2, Quiet Spark Thrower (ranged): *Shocked* 3, Powered	**Trade:** Sells items of Rarity 2 or less, and may have a few Rarity 3 items (GM's discretion). Will buy other items.

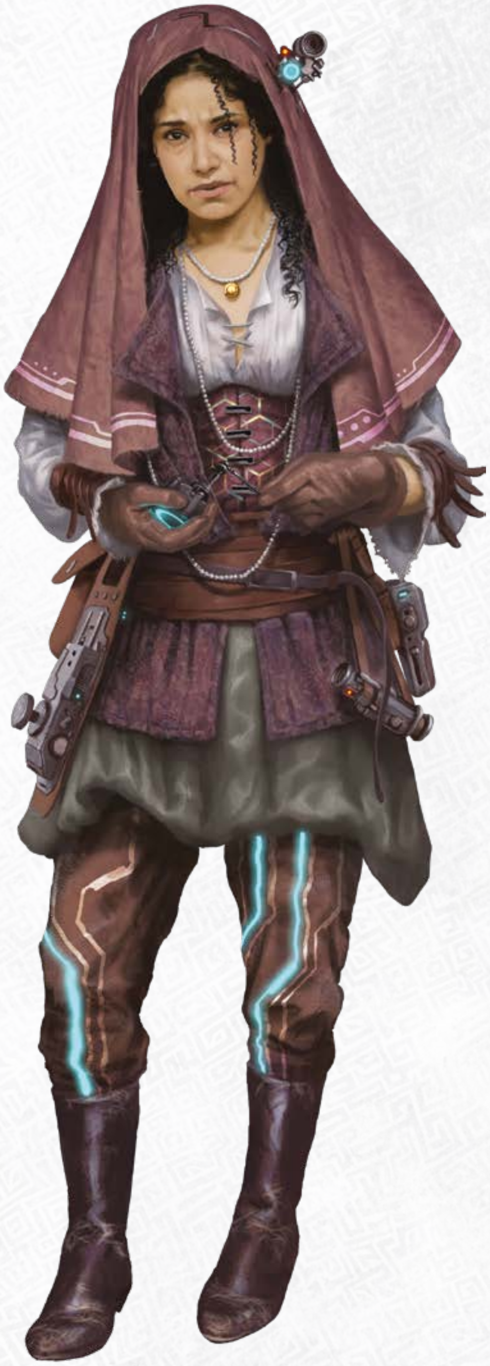
SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Haggle: The PCs may make a **Difficulty 2 Quickness (Talk)** Test, success reduces price by 1, failure or complications each increase price by 1.

EVERAN TRADER

Everan communities frequently contain traders and merchants, offering their wares to passers-by and visitors as well as to their own community. In some cases, they may even travel to other communities to buy and sell on behalf of their village, often using a salvaged vehicle if the journey is long enough.

This profile can also be used for River Traders – simply change the name and replace the Truth with "Canny River Merchant".



ARCHIVIST EXPERIMENTALIST

Many Archivist conclaves are 'home', for lack of a better term, to wandering scholars whose research takes place in the wilds and ruins of the world. They tend to be eccentric loners, as likely to be friend or enemy depending on their circumstances and the needs of their research.

ARCHIVIST EXPERIMENTALIST

ECCENTRIC ARCHIVIST SCHOLAR		DEFAULT	
12	3	8	1

WEAPONS

Shock Prod (melee): *Shocked* 3 or *Stunned* 3, Powered

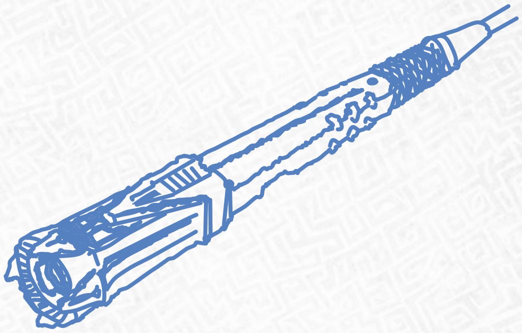
Custom Pulser (ranged): *Burned* 3, Burst, Powered

ACTIONS

GLIF: Protect: The NPC spends 2 Threat and applies a GLIF to a person or object. A machine which sees that GLIF will work to protect that person or object.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Personal Threat: 3



ARCHIVIST GRABBER

Archivist conclaves rely on acquisitions of information and technology fragments. While they're willing to pay for items that pass their way in trade, there are some items that need to be acquired through more direct means. Archivist Grabbers are well-equipped and extremely capable of getting into the most dangerous places… and they're also extremely competitive, rarely willing to give up on a prize they've located.

ARCHIVIST GRABBER

COMPETITIVE ARCHIVIST GRABBER		DEFAULT	
12	3	8	1

WEAPONS

Mono-Knife (melee): *Lacerated* 2

Hunting Pulser (ranged): *Burned* 3, Long Range, Powered

ACTIONS

Covert Cloak: Spend 1 Threat. The NPC is hidden. PCs must succeed at an **Insight (Sneak)** Test contested by the NPC's **Quickness (Sneak)** Test to locate them.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Swift: The NPC is quick and maneuverable. When this NPC takes an action, it may spend 1 Threat to move one extra zone before or after its action.

ISOLATIONIST DREAMER

Dreamer communities tend to be wary of outsiders – especially those bearing high-tech devices – in general, though it's rare for them to be outright hostile. A few Dreamer settlements are more reclusive still, shunning outsiders and the old technologies that have caused so many problems.

ISOLATIONIST DREAMER

WARY DREAMER GATHERER		DEFAULT	
11	3	9	2

WEAPONS

Dagger (melee): *Bleeding 2*, Quiet

Bow (ranged): *Impale 1*, Long Ranged, Quiet

ACTIONS

Use the Terrain: The NPC spends 1 Threat and creates a Truth on their current zone, representing a hidden trap or hazard.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Personal Threat: 1

HOSTILE SPEAR

Spears mostly dwell in the old cities, traveling around and hunting to sustain themselves and prove their skills, venturing near to other settlements only out of a need to trade. But some rare bands of Spears become enamored of the violence they can inflict and their ability to take what they please from others, becoming dangerous to any who cross their path.

HOSTILE SPEAR

BLOODTHIRSTY SPEAR WARRIOR		DEFAULT	
13	4	9	2

WEAPONS

Electrospear smelee): *Shocked 4*, *Breaker*, Powered

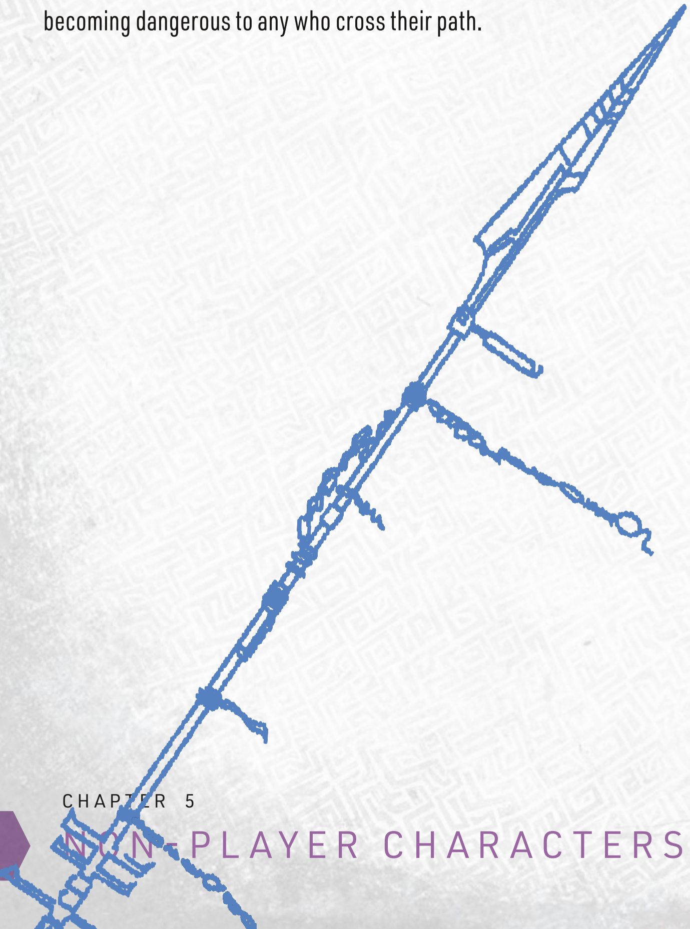
ACTIONS

Ambush: May only attempt while hidden. The NPC emerges from the shadows in a zone of its choosing and makes a melee attack with their Electrospear. The target cannot defend against this attack.

Lurk: Spend 1 Threat while the NPC is in darkness or otherwise has cover or concealment. The NPC is hidden. PCs must succeed at an **Insight (Sneak)** Test contested by the NPC's **Quickness (Sneak)** Test to locate it.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (Reduced to 1 vs *Breaker* attacks)



SPEAR OUTRIDER

These Spears eschew stealth for speed and surprise, and often work as scouts and vanguards for their kin. Mounted on horseback, and often accompanied by Wolf Hunters, these riders can strike and withdraw swiftly, avoiding retaliation.

SPEAR OUTRIDER

SPEAR ON HORSEBACK		DEFAULT	
12	3	8	2

WEAPONS

Electrospear (melee): *Shocked* 4, Breaker, Powered

Hooves (melee): *Trampled* 3

ACTIONS

Cavalry Charge: Spend 2 Threat when the Spear Outrider moves and makes a melee attack; the attack inflicts two injuries, one from each of the NPC's melee weapons.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (Reduced to 1 vs *Breaker* attacks)

Cavalry: When the Spear Outrider is defeated, it may spend 1 Threat to have the attack only defeat the rider or mount. Replace the Spear Outrider with either a single Hostile Spear or a single Horse.

Swift: When this NPC takes an action, it may spend 1 Threat to move one extra zone before or after its action.

SPEAR CHAMPION

Some of the deadliest and most experienced Spears are often given the responsibility of leading hunting parties and larger raids into the ruins

SPEAR CHAMPION

VETERAN SPEAR LEADER		DEFAULT	
14	4	9	2

WEAPONS

Electro-Spear (melee): *Shocked* 4, Breaker, Powered

ACTIONS

Ambush: as Hostile Spear.

Lurk: as Hostile Spear.

Command: Select one Spear NPC or Spear group in the same or an adjacent zone, and spend 1 Threat. That NPC or group immediately takes an additional action, assisted by the Spear Champion.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (Reduced to 1 vs *Breaker* attacks

Personal Threat: 3

THRALLS

Thralls can be found roving ruins and near settlements often on missions to raid for supplies or specific technologies.

THRALLS KEEP OUT!

THRALL

THRALL RAIDER		DEFAULT	
12	3	7	1

WEAPONS

Hooked Spear (melee): *Impaled 2*

Barbed Javelin (ranged): *Bleeding 2*

ACTIONS

Tomorrow's Problem: The Thrall retreats from the fight and takes no further part in the scene. Add 1 to Threat.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (Reduced to 1 vs Breaker attacks)

THRALL GROUP

BAND OF THRALLS		DEFAULT	
12	3	7	1

WEAPONS

Hooked Spear (melee): *Impaled 2*

Barbed Javelin (ranged): *Bleeding 2*

ACTIONS

Encircle: The NPCs use their action to outflank and trap an enemy. On their next attack against an enemy in the same zone, they add +1 to the attack's Damage Rating.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (Reduced to 1 vs Breaker Attacks

DARK CITY THRALLS

These Thralls, and their better known contingent, the Lost Souls Thralls, have fallen under the control of the Dark City, willingly or otherwise. These raiding bands form the bulk of the Dark City's operatives and act as their foot soldiers in the world.

DARK CITY THRALL

SERVANT OF THE DARK CITY		DEFAULT	
13	3	8	2

WEAPONS	ACTIONS
Thrall Electrospear (melee/ranged): *Shocked* 4, Breaker, Powered, Scary Repulser Glove (ranged): *Concussed* 4, Non-Lethal	**Repulser Jump:** When the NPC moves, spend 1 Threat to allow them to jump, ignoring gaps, changes in elevation, or obstacles shorter than a human.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (Reduced to 1 vs *Breaker* attacks)

DARK CITY THRALL RIDER

BARG-MOUNTED THRALL		DEFAULT	
13	3	7	1

WEAPONS	ACTIONS
Thrall Electro-Spear (melee/ranged): *Shocked* 4, Breaker, Powered, Scary Goring Tusks (melee): *Impaled* 3	**Cavalry Charge:** Spend 2 Threat when the Thrall Rider moves and makes a melee attack; the attack inflicts two injuries, one from each of the NPC's melee weapons.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (Reduced to 1 vs *Breaker* attacks)

Cavalry: When the Thrall Rider is defeated, it may spend 1 Threat to have the attack only defeat the rider or mount. Replace the Thrall Rider with either a single Thrall or a single Barg.

Swift: When this NPC takes an action, it may spend 1 Threat to move one extra zone before or after its action.

DARK CITY THRALL RIDER

Thralls mounted upon cybernetically-enhanced Bargs and equipped with technology used to control the stubborn, aggressive beasts. These riders are sometimes used as scouts, sometimes as shock troops.

BAND OF DARK CITY THRALLS

BAND OF THRALLS		DEFAULT	
13	3	8	2

WEAPONS

Thrall Electrospear (melee/ranged): *Shocked* 4, Breaker, Powered, Scary

Repulser Glove (ranged): *Concussed* 4, Non-Lethal

ACTIONS

Encircle: The NPCs use their action to outflank and trap an enemy. On their next attack against an enemy in the same zone, they add +1 to the attack's Damage Rating

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 2 (Reduced to 1 vs *Breaker* attacks)

DARK CITY FIELD AGENT

There are occasional rumors of well-equipped, high-tech Dark City operatives. Clad in sophisticated armor and carrying deadly weapons, these agents are formidable fighters, and require considerable effort to stop.

DARK CITY FIELD AGENT

TRUSTED AGENT OF THE DARK CITY		DEFAULT	
13	4	9	2

WEAPONS

Plasma Repeater (ranged): *Plasma Burn* 3, Burst, Breaker, Powered

In-built Blade (melee): *Lacerated* 3

ACTIONS

Suppressive Fire: Spend 1 Threat and make a ranged attack. If the attack is successful, instead of inflicting an Injury, the target gains a *pinned down* Truth instead.

Tomorrow's Problem: The Agent retreats from the fight and takes no further part in the scene. Add 1 to Threat.

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Armored: Protection 3 (Reduced to 2 vs *Breaker* attacks)

Personal Threat: 2

Objective Achieved: At the start of the scene, note what the Agent's goal is – this might be kept secret from the players, or be known to them. Once the Agent completes their goal, add 3 to Threat.

FOUNDER SCIENTIST

Mysterious figures who demonstrate strange powers and uncanny influence over technology, Founders seem to be the true power behind the forces of the Dark City.

DARK CITY FOUNDER SCIENTIST

PERSONAL THREAT:	DEFEAT:
4	2 INJURIES

Mysterious Figure with Dangerous Knowledge

MIGHT	QUICKNESS	INSIGHT	RESOLVE
6	10	12	8

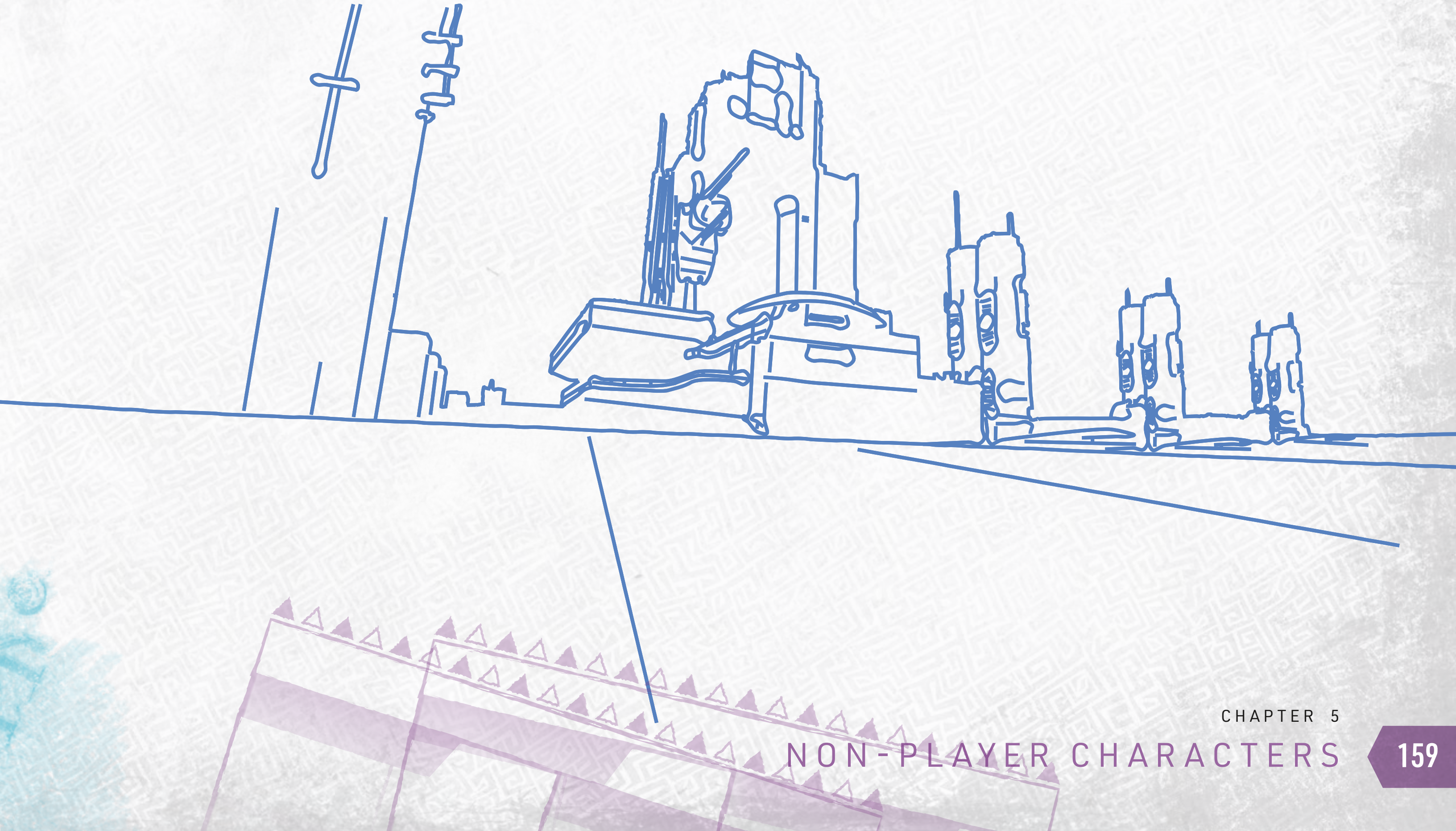
MOVE	FIGHT	SNEAK	TALK	OPERATE	STUDY	SURVIVE
2	1	3	2	4	3	1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Armor: Protection 2 (Reduced to 1 vs *Breaker* attacks)

Solitary: The NPC may take more than one turn each round, but each turn after the first costs Threat: the first extra turn costs 1 Threat, the second costs 2, and so forth

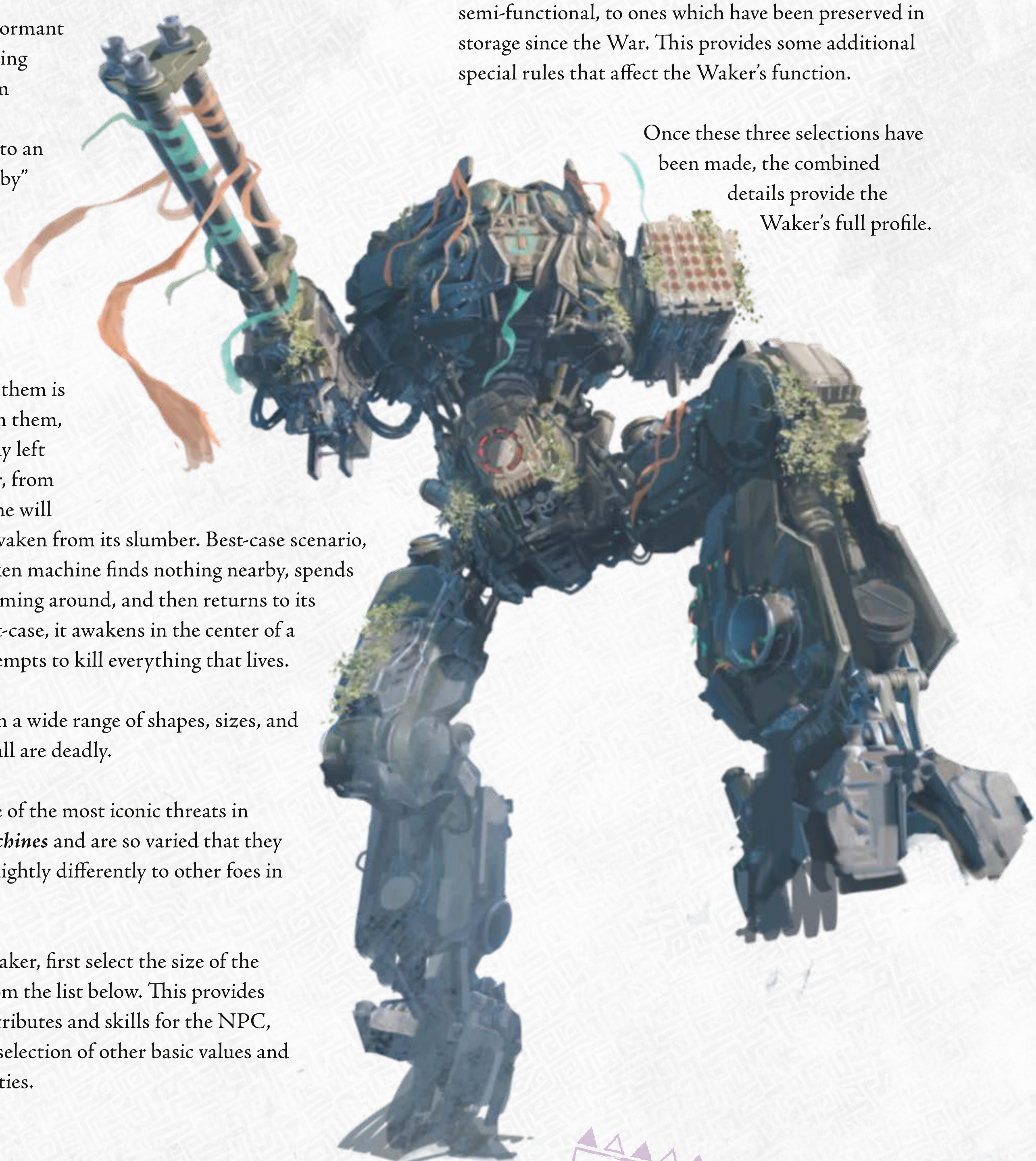
ACTION	D20 ROLL	DESCRIPTION
Electro-Sceptre	1–3	The Founder strikes with their electrified staff. Make a melee attack. **Might (Fight)**: 6 (1) **Electro-Sceptre:** Melee, *Shocked* 3, Breaker, Powered
Drone Swarm	4–6	The Founder's drones buzz around, unleashing a flurry of bolts of light. Make a ranged attack. Spend Threat to hit additional targets – 2 Threat per target after the first. **Quickness (Fight):** 10 (1) **Drone Pulsars:** Ranged, Burned 2, Burst, Powered
Power Up I	7–10	The Founder arcs power to one of their allies. Pick a single NPC or Mob in the same zone. They recharge one Powered weapon, or add +1 to the Cost of their next attack.
Power Up II	11–14	The Founder's power can influence machines nearby. Pick a machine NPC in the same zone. The machine immediately takes an extra action, and any Skill Test is assisted by the Founder's Insight (Operate). **Insight (Operate):** 12 (4)
Power Up III	15–17	The Founder wards themselves with some unknown power. Until the NPC's next turn, the Founder gains +2 Protection, or +1 vs Breaker attacks.
Tomorrow's Problem	18–20	The Founder retreats from battle, concealed by some unknown technology. The NPC takes no further part in this scene, add 2 to Threat.



WAKERS

Wakers are the ancient, dormant robots which litter the landscape. Driven by sophisticated A.I. protocols, and fed constant data, they were once a vital part of the infrastructure of civilization on Evera Prime… until they were driven into a murderous frenzy by a corruption of their data-feeds.

Most became dormant long ago, shielding themselves from the EMPs and withdrawing into an armored "standby" testudo mode. In this form, they're nigh-impossible to damage, and anything able to damage them is likely to awaken them, so they're mostly left alone. However, from time to time, one will mysteriously awaken from its slumber. Best-case scenario, the newly-awoken machine finds nothing nearby, spends a few hours roaming around, and then returns to its slumber. Worst-case, it awakens in the center of a village, and attempts to kill everything that lives.



Wakers come in a wide range of shapes, sizes, and functions, but all are deadly.

Wakers are one of the most iconic threats in ***Dreams & Machines*** and are so varied that they are presented slightly differently to other foes in this chapter.

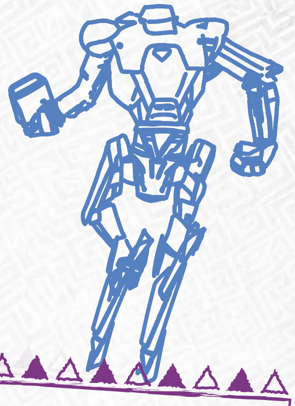
- For each Waker, first select the size of the machine from the list below. This provides the basic attributes and skills for the NPC, as well as a selection of other basic values and special abilities.
- Second, select the Waker's function. Each function provides a selection of actions the Waker can undertake, which includes the Waker's weapons and other equipment.
- Finally, select the Waker's condition — this is the state of repair the Waker is in, ranging from damaged and semi-functional, to ones which have been preserved in storage since the War. This provides some additional special rules that affect the Waker's function.

Once these three selections have been made, the combined details provide the Waker's full profile.

WAKER SIZE

SMALL

A Small Waker stands around twice the height of a person, though they are flexible and mobile enough to move fairly easily through human-scaled spaces. Their smaller size means less space for self-repair and sensor systems.



SMALL WAKER

PERSONAL THREAT:	DEFEAT:
3	2 INJURIES

Compact and Agile Machine

MIGHT	QUICKNESS	INSIGHT	RESOLVE
10	12	8	6

MOVE	FIGHT	SNEAK	TALK	OPERATE	STUDY	SURVIVE
4	2	2	1	3	3	1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Armor Plating: Protection 4 (Reduced to 2 vs Breaker attacks)

Agile: The NPC may reroll 1d20 on any Skill Test to move over or through difficult terrain or obstacles.

Solitary: The NPC may take more than one turn each round, but each turn after the first costs Threat: the first extra turn costs 1 Threat, the second costs 2, and so forth.

MEDIUM

A Medium Waker stands three or four times the height of a person, typically standing on three or more legs, on tracks, or on several wheels for stability. They are common in military and industrial uses, as a compromise between size and stability.

MEDIUM WAKER

PERSONAL THREAT:	DEFEAT:
5	3 INJURIES

Cumbersome Machine, Sturdy and Durable

MIGHT	QUICKNESS	INSIGHT	RESOLVE
12	8	6	10

MOVE	FIGHT	SNEAK	TALK	OPERATE	STUDY	SURVIVE
3	4	1	1	3	2	2

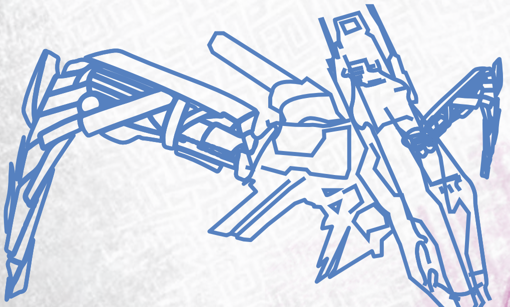
SPECIAL ABILITIES

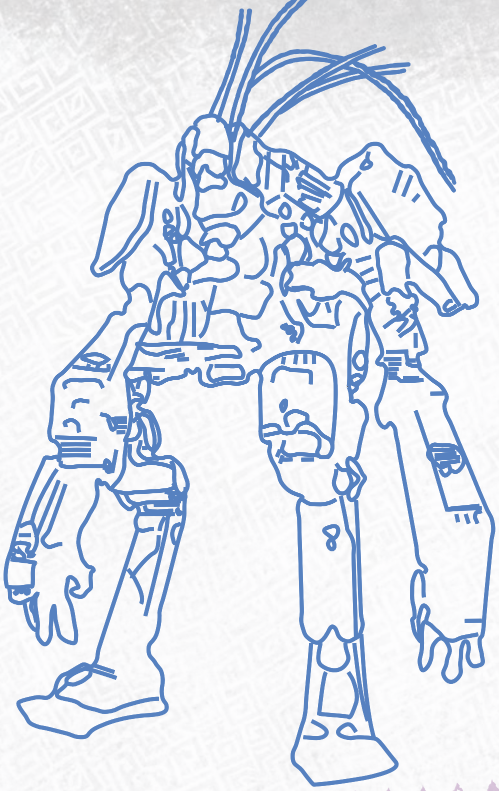
Armor Plating: Protection 6 (Reduced to 3 vs *Breaker* attacks)

Big and Slow: Reduce difficulty of ranged attacks against this NPC by 1

Threatening: The NPC adds +1 to Threat each time it takes an action.

Solitary: The NPC may take more than one turn each round, but each turn after the first costs Threat: the first extra turn costs 1 Threat, the second costs 2, and so forth.





LARGE

A Large Waker is often only slightly taller than a Medium Waker, but significantly broader, often configured with caterpillar tracks, or on platforms with four or six legs. In industrial uses, they frequently served as construction and cargo hauler vehicles, while large combat robots would often serve as heavy artillery and anti-armor platforms, typically supported by infantry riding upon the back.

LARGE WAKER

PERSONAL THREAT:	DEFEAT:
7	4 INJURIES

Bulky Heavy Machine, Massive Armored Form, Room for Passengers

MIGHT	QUICKNESS	INSIGHT	RESOLVE
14	6	10	12

MOVE	FIGHT	SNEAK	TALK	OPERATE	STUDY	SURVIVE
2	4	1	1	3	2	3

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Armor Plating Protection 8 (Reduced to 4 vs *Breaker* attacks)

Ponderous: Reduce difficulty of ranged attacks against this NPC by 2, to a minimum of 1. The NPC may not move on its turn as characters normally do: instead, they must take an action, and a **Quickness (Move)** Test with a Difficulty of 0 to move 1 zone.

Threatening: The NPC adds +1 to Threat each time it takes an action.

Solitary: The NPC may take more than one turn each round, but each turn after the first costs Threat: the first extra turn costs 1 Threat, the second costs 2, and so forth.

WAKER FUNCTION

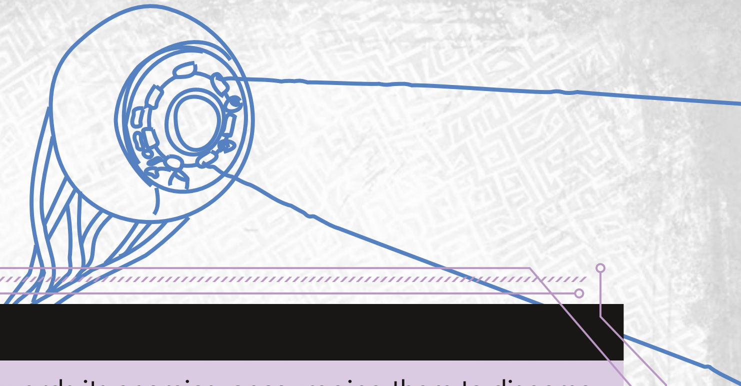
INDUSTRIAL

This Waker is equipped for heavy construction and industrial work.

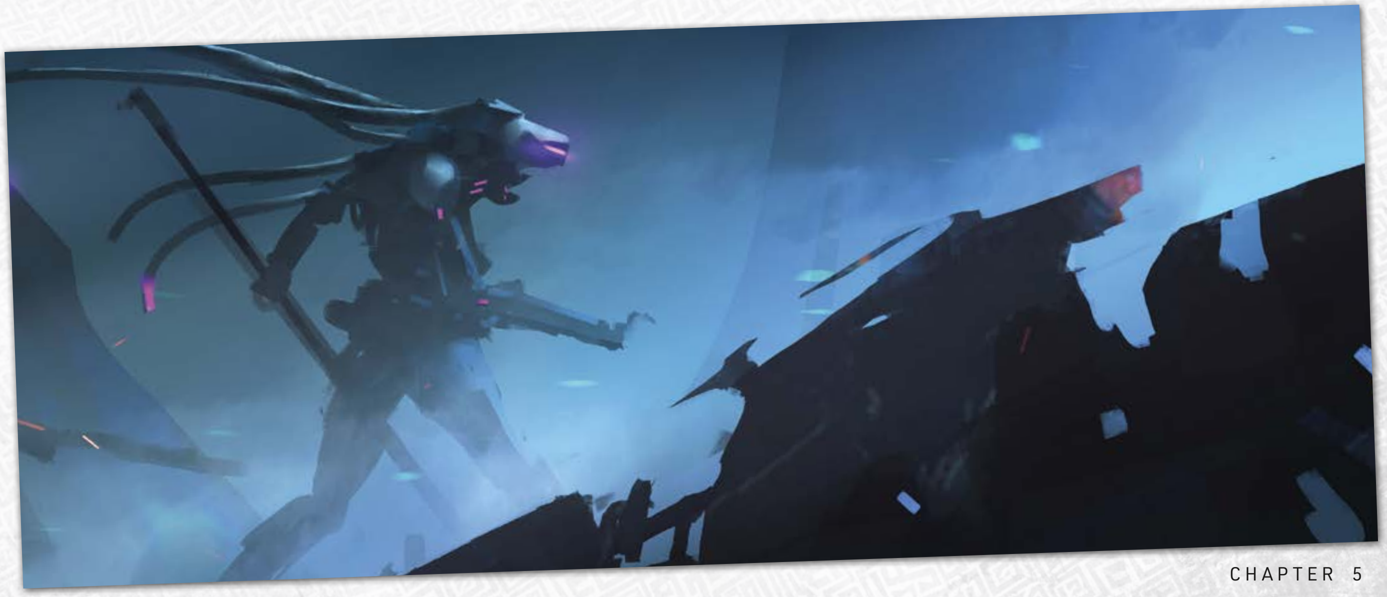
ACTION	D20 ROLL	DESCRIPTION
Crush	1-5	The machine grinds forwards, seeking to trample and crush an enemy. It makes a melee attack against a single enemy in the same zone. **Might (Fight)** **Crushing Bulk:** Melee Attack, *Crushed 4*
Improvised Gun	6-10	The machine employs a rivet gun, industrial stapler, or similar device as a short-ranged weapon, spitting projectiles intended to bind structures together. **Quickness (Fight)** **Improvised Gun:** Ranged Attack, *Impale 3*
Grabbing Claw	11-15	The machine reaches out to grasp a nearby foe. The machine chooses a target within melee range and makes a **Might (Fight)** contest, opposed by the target's **Quickness (Move)**; if the machine is successful, the target suffers a *grabbed* Truth. A *grabbed* enemy cannot move away from the machine and cannot defend against melee attacks.
Self-Repair	16-20	The machine pauses, activating diagnostics and self-repair protocols. It makes a **Resolve (Operate)** Test with a Difficulty of 2 to remove any one hindering Truth affecting it.

CIVIL SECURITY

This Waker was outfitted and configured for public safety, security, and crowd control.

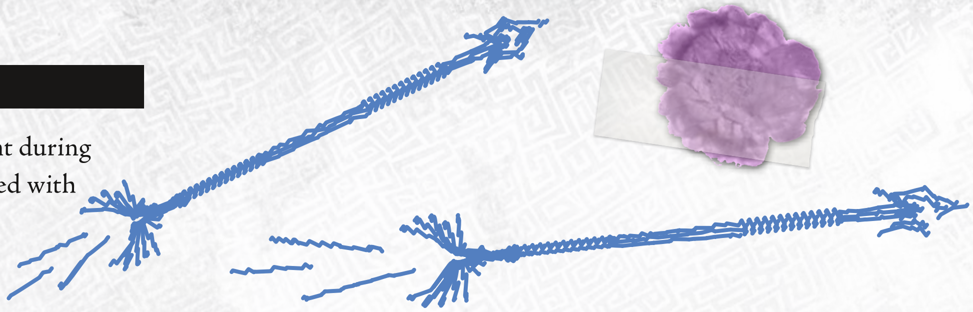


ACTION	D20 ROLL	DESCRIPTION
Discourage	1-4	The machine pushes towards its enemies, encouraging them to disperse with a potent electro-shock field. Make a melee attack. **Might (Fight)** **Deterrence Shock Field:** Melee Attack, *Shocked 4*, Burst, Non-Lethal, Powered
Restrain	5-8	The machine sprays the vicinity with a fast-expanding, fast-setting foam that entraps and restrains Make a ranged attack. **Quickness (Fight)** **Riot Foam:** Ranged Attack, *Trapped 3*, Breaker, Non-Lethal
Repel	9-12	The machine launches a volley of suppression grenades, which detonate with a bright flash, intense noise, and irritant smoke, disrupting and disorienting crowds of foes. Spend 1 Threat to make a ranged attack, but targeting a single zone rather than an enemy. All enemies in the target zone are hit if the attack is successful. **Quickness (Fight)** **Improvised Gun:** Ranged Attack, *Stunned 2*, Burst, Loud, Non-Lethal
Blockade	13-16	The machine locks down into a defensive mode, attempting to block any who seek to pass it. Until the start of its next turn, the machine may defend against any attack, using **Might (Fight)**, and any enemy attempting to move past the machine must pass a Difficulty 2 **Quickness (Move)** Test or be forced to stay within the machine's zone.
Self-Repair	17-20	The machine pauses, activating diagnostics and self-repair protocols. It makes a **Resolve (Operate)** Test with a Difficulty of 2 to remove any one hindering Truth affecting it.

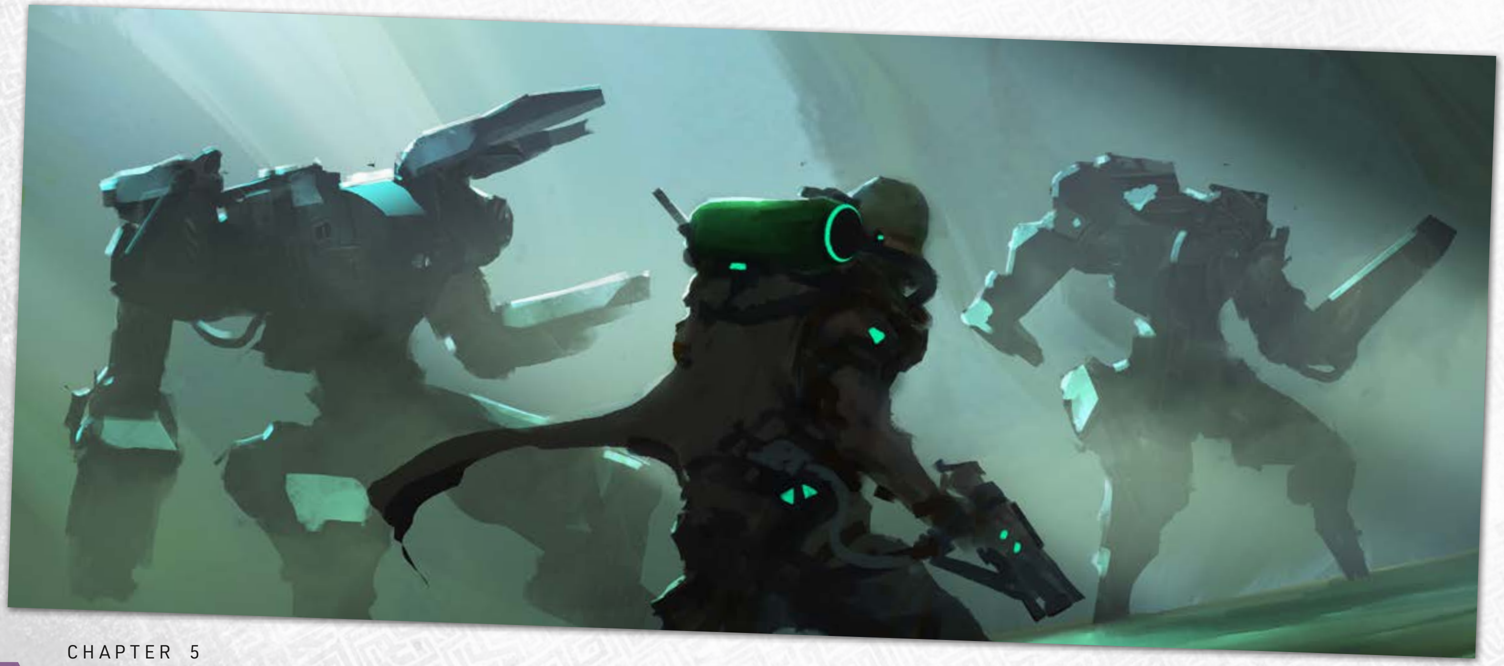


MILITARY COMBAT

Front-line combat robots were a common sight during the war, and extremely deadly adversaries fitted with powerful weapons.



ACTION	D20 ROLL	DESCRIPTION
Trample	1-4	The machine grinds forwards, seeking to trample and crush an enemy. It moves towards one enemy and makes a melee attack against them. **Might (Fight)** **Deadly Bulk:** Melee Attack, *Crushed 4 [x2]*
Plasma Blast	5-8	The machine pivots, tracking a target, and then opens fire with its cannon. It makes a ranged attack against one enemy it can see. **Quickness (Fight)** **Plasma Cannon:** Ranged Attack, *Plasma Burn 5*, Breaker, Powered
Missile Salvo	9-12	The machine locks onto a single enemy and unleashes a missile against them. It does not move this turn. Spend 1, 2, or 3 Threat and choose an enemy in a different zone. That enemy must pass a **Quickness (Move)** Test with a difficulty equal to the Threat spent or be hit by the missile. **Missile Launcher:** Ranged Attack, *Shrapnel 3 [x2]*, Long Ranged, Loud
Defend	13-16	The machine withdraws into itself, extending armor plates and other countermeasures. The machine gains +2 Protection until next turn, and it counters any failed melee attack against it with the Electro-Defence Field for free. **Electro-Defence Field:** Melee Attack, *Shocked 3*, Powered
Self-Repair	17-20	The machine pauses, activating diagnostics and self-repair protocols. It makes a **Resolve (Operate)** Test with a Difficulty of 2 to remove any one hindering Truth affecting it.



MILITARY SUPPORT

Military support robots were often used in support of other forces, either squadrons of combat robots, or platoons of infantry, providing supporting fire, protection, and other aid to their allies.

ACTION	D20 ROLL	DESCRIPTION
Crush	1–3	The machine grinds forwards, seeking to trample and crush an enemy. It moves towards one enemy and makes a melee attack against them. **Might (Fight)** **Crushing Bulk:** Melee Attack, *Crushed 4*
Suppressive Fire	4–6	The machine pivots, tracking a target, and then opens fire with several rapid-fire plasma weapons. It makes a ranged attack against one enemy it can see, plus up to two additional enemies by spending 1 Threat for each extra target. **Quickness (Fight)** **Heavy Plasma Repeaters:** Ranged Attack, *Plasma Burn 3*, Burst, Breaker, Powered.
Disruption	7–9	The machine launches a volley of disruptive grenades which fill the vicinity with dense smoke and sensor-scrambling nano-chaff. Spend up to 3 Threat, and select that many zones visible to the machine. Each of those zones gains the Truth *disruptive smoke*.
Protect	10–12	The machine deploys additional panels and armor plates, as well as impact-absorbing nano-barriers to protect nearby allies. Until the start of the machine's next turn, the machine's allies in its zone are able to defend themselves against ranged attacks, and attacks against them increase in difficulty by +1.
Recharge	13–15	The machine siphons some of its power supply to recharge a Powered weapon or item used by itself or an ally within the same zone.
Self-Repair	16–20	The machine pauses, activating diagnostics and self-repair protocols. It makes a **Resolve (Operate)** Test with a Difficulty of 2 to remove any one hindering Truth affecting it.

WAKER CONDITION

Select one of the following categories, which will modify the abilities provided by the Waker's Size, and the Actions provided by the Waker's Function.

DAMAGED

The Waker's structure has been seriously damaged, whether by the elements, by combat, or by salvage. Make the following changes:

- **Damaged:** The Waker suffers complications on any d20 roll of 18, 19, or 20 when making a Skill Test.
- **Lost Functionality:** Choose or randomly select one of the Waker's actions. The Waker can no longer take that action.
- **Reduced Endurance:** The Waker's number of Injuries before defeat is reduced by 1. In addition, reduce the Protection provided by the Waker's Armor Plating ability by 2.
- **Inefficient:** The Waker's Personal Threat is reduced by 2.

DECREPIT

The Waker's systems and structure have been damaged, corroded by time and exposure to the elements, and it no longer functions as effectively as it once did. Make the following changes:

- **Decrepit:** The Waker suffers complications on any d20 roll of 19 or 20 when making a Skill Test.
- **Reduced Endurance:** The Waker's number of Injuries before defeat is reduced by 1. In addition, reduce the Protection provided by the Waker's Armor Plating ability by 2.

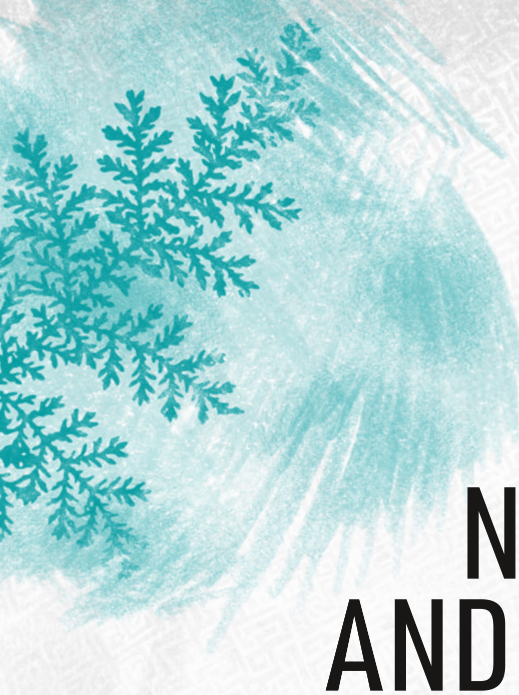
INTACT

The Waker is more or less as functional as when it was originally put into service. Make no changes to the Waker's rules.

SHELTERED

The Waker was kept in storage, safe and secure from the elements and any other conditions that would impair them. The Waker is as good as new, and functions perfectly. Make the following changes:

- **Reliable:** Each scene, the Waker may ignore one complication suffered.
- **Efficient:** The Waker's Personal Threat is increased by +2.



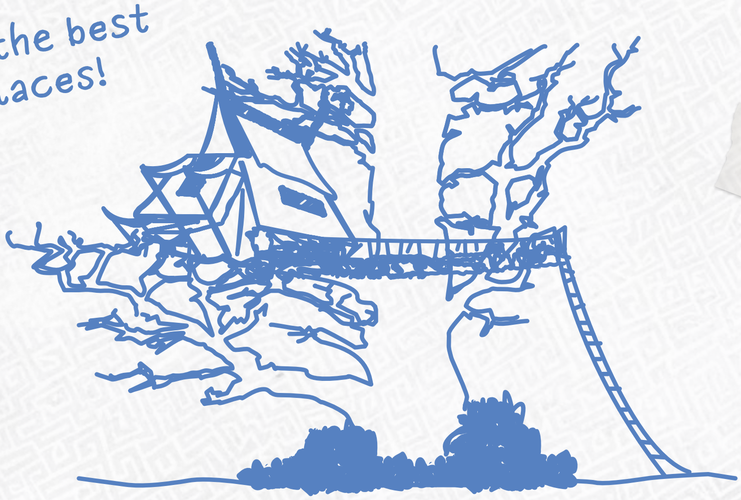
CHAPTER 6

NEW MOSSGROVE AND THE SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT

Lets go exploring somewhere new!!!

New Mossgrove sits at the heart of the region of Regis-Kasteel, once a powerful, important place, before the Builder attacked. Kasteel was nuked to the ground, leaving only ruins, but in the time since the War, many communities have grown up in the surrounding area. This chapter goes into depth on New Mossgrove and its surrounding environs, highlighting areas of interest and places that are just crying out to be explored by a group of hearty adventurers.

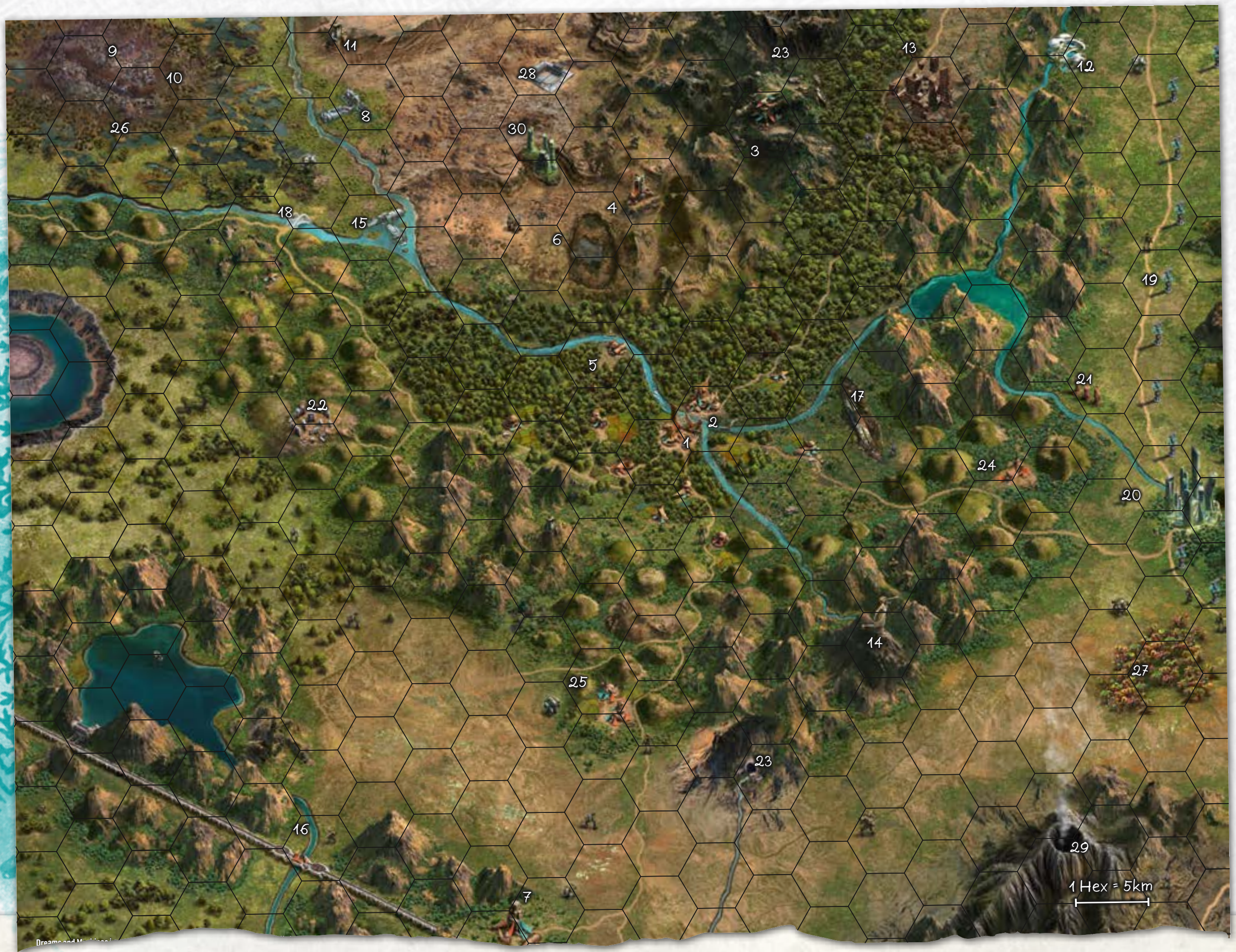
I know all the best hiding places!



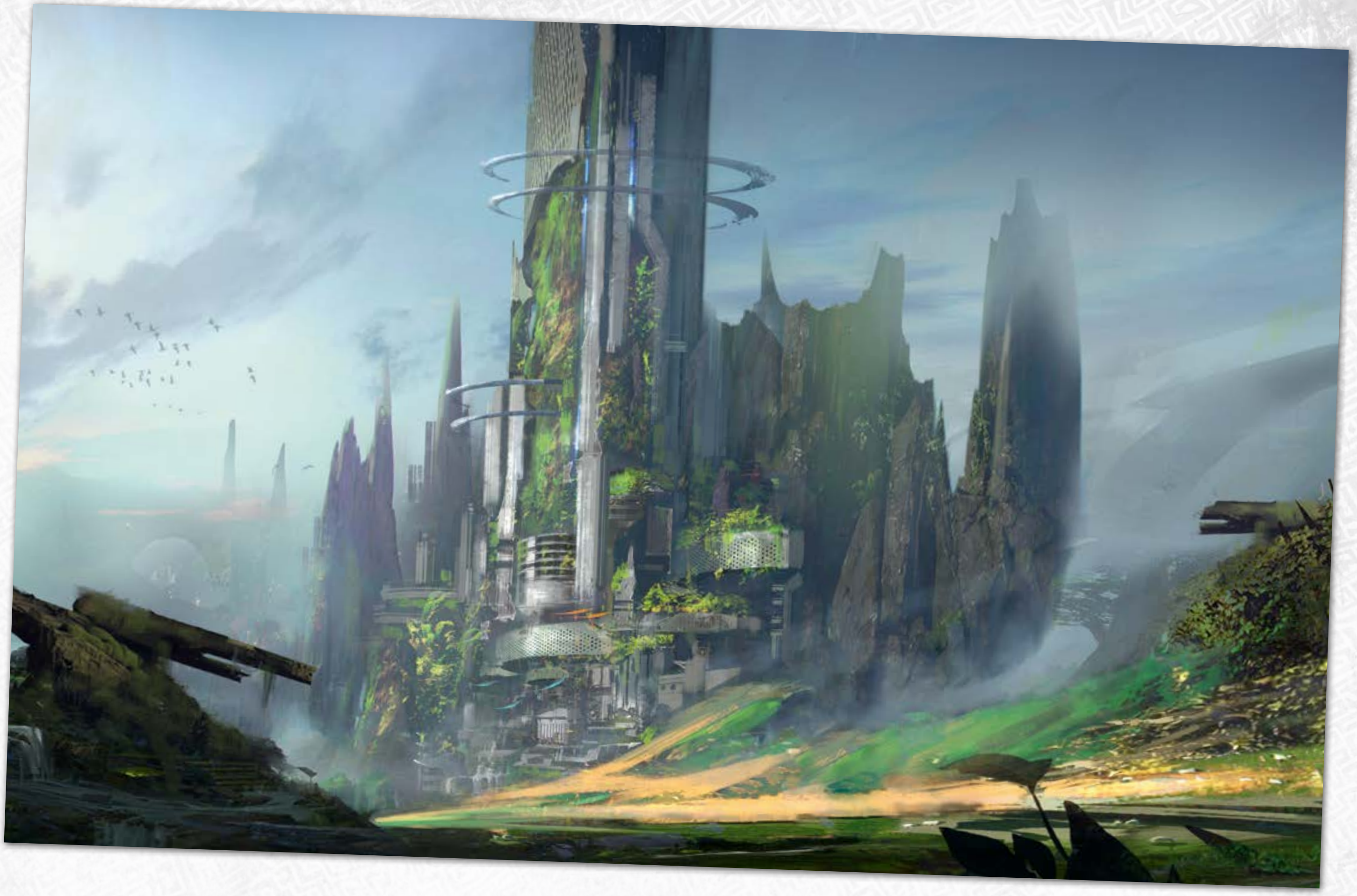
THE REGION OF REGIS-KASTEEL

Pre-war, the region of Regis-Kasteel was dominated by the administrative and scientific powerhouse that was Kasteel City. Once, its imposing skyline was a mile high, and its power delved deep underground. Its importance meant it was a principle target of the Builder's first assault on Nedresita. Once the mechs took it the Everans had no option — with the most reluctant hand they nuked its beauty from the landscape, denying the city to the Builder. All that remains are the charred remnants of the city, the irradiated wastes to the north, and Dorinda Wastes to the west.

Regis-Kasteel remains a lush region of Nedresita. The bubbling lake of Hyloft feeds three rivers, the Grand Hyloft, Lower Hyloft, and Hyloft Beck. The Grand Hyloft, the biggest river in the region, runs east to west before forking into the Wylera and Carspeth rivers. The ground to the west, and the western banks,



1: New Mossgrove
2: Callisto's Lodge
3: Elion Hill
4: Padrol Tower
5: Apidae Homestead
6: Dead Lake
7: Deepwoods Archive
8: Ruined medical lab
9: Nuked city of Kasteel
10: Nanographic Pavilion
11: Ruined tower
12: Ruined apartments
13: Manufacturing Plant
14: Spyglass Statue
15: Flooded vehicle depot
16: The Viaduct Dreamers
17: Exposed Vacuum Tubes
18: Poseidon's Bridge
19: Energy Pylons
20: The city of Sanktejo
21: The Field of Poets
22: Antikva Henge
23: The Canal Tunnel
24: Printempo Settlement
25: Soleco Camp
26: The city underbelly
27: Akriti herding grounds
28: Hell's Gate
29: The Refuge
30: Los Rios



of the Carspeth were shattered by the nuclear attack on Kasteel, and ever since the waters have run off, creating the rancid miasma that is the Mortiga Marshlands. To the east the Lower Hyloft flows under the bridging city of Sanktejo and into the Jendra-koi wildlife reserve, long breached and teeming with life. Hyloft Beck runs north through gorges, ravines, and over waterfalls into the northern wilderness. Rumor has it that if you follow this river far enough it will lead you to the deserted megacity of Emerta, still and silent, the *'City of Sighs'* as the Spears call it.

Sitting at the confluence of the Grand Hyloft and the Vaporoko rivers, the settlement of New Mossgrove is the growing epicentre of trade and exploration in this part of the world. To the north the reaches are untamed, wild, dangerous, and largely unexplored. To the south lies ground that's occupied, farmed, improved — civilized, some would say. New Mossgrove sits on the leading edge of this civilization, drawing traders, explorers, and homesteaders alike. Regis-Kasteel is a place full of opportunity and excitement, but dangers still lurk here.

LOCATIONS

1 - NEW MOSSGROVE

A thriving community living on the edge of the wilderness.

2 - CALLISTO'S LODGE

The out-of-town home of Callisto, New Mossgrove's Spearmaster.

3 - ELION HILL

A settlement forged within the colossal wreckage of a once fine spaceship, now embedded within the peaks of the mountains north of New Mossgrove.

4 - PADROL TOWER

A small and isolated Archivist settlement in the hills just east of the Dead Lake and Dorinda Wastes.

5 - THE APIDAE HOMESTEAD

A thriving community of Dreamers living along the Grand Hyloft, a few miles from New Mossgrove.

6 - THE DEAD LAKE

A dried-up lake bed, at the southern edge of the Dorinda Wastes.

7 - DEEPWOODS ARCHIVE

A thriving and influential Archivist settlement, to the south of New Mossgrove. It lies within the scorched region of Deepwood, an ancient forest that was burnt to cinders by the raging wildfires sparked during the War.

8 - RUINED MEDICAL LAB

The remains of a once thriving facility, on the western reaches of the Dorinda Wastes.

9 - THE NUKED CITY OF KASTEEL

The once majestic city now lies in nuclear ruin.

10 - NANOGRAPHIC PAVILION

One of the few standing structures left in the ruins of Kasteel.

11 - THE RUINED TOWER

This tower stands precariously on the tip of a deep canyon, in the Dorinda Wasteland.

12 - RUINED LUXURY APARTMENTS

Shattered and crumbling, who knows what Old World wonders still hide in the rubble.

13 - MANUFACTURING PLANT

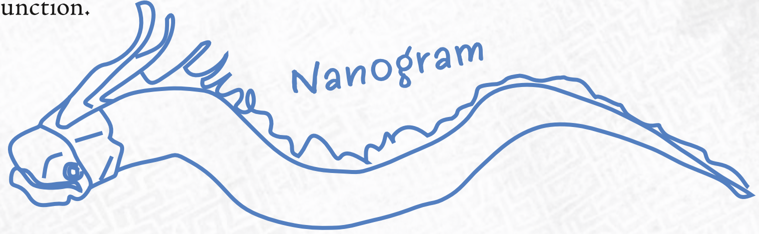
Located within the desolate wreckage of an extensive built-up area, this factory, of staggering size and complexity, still looks elegant, built into the landscape to hide its ugly function.

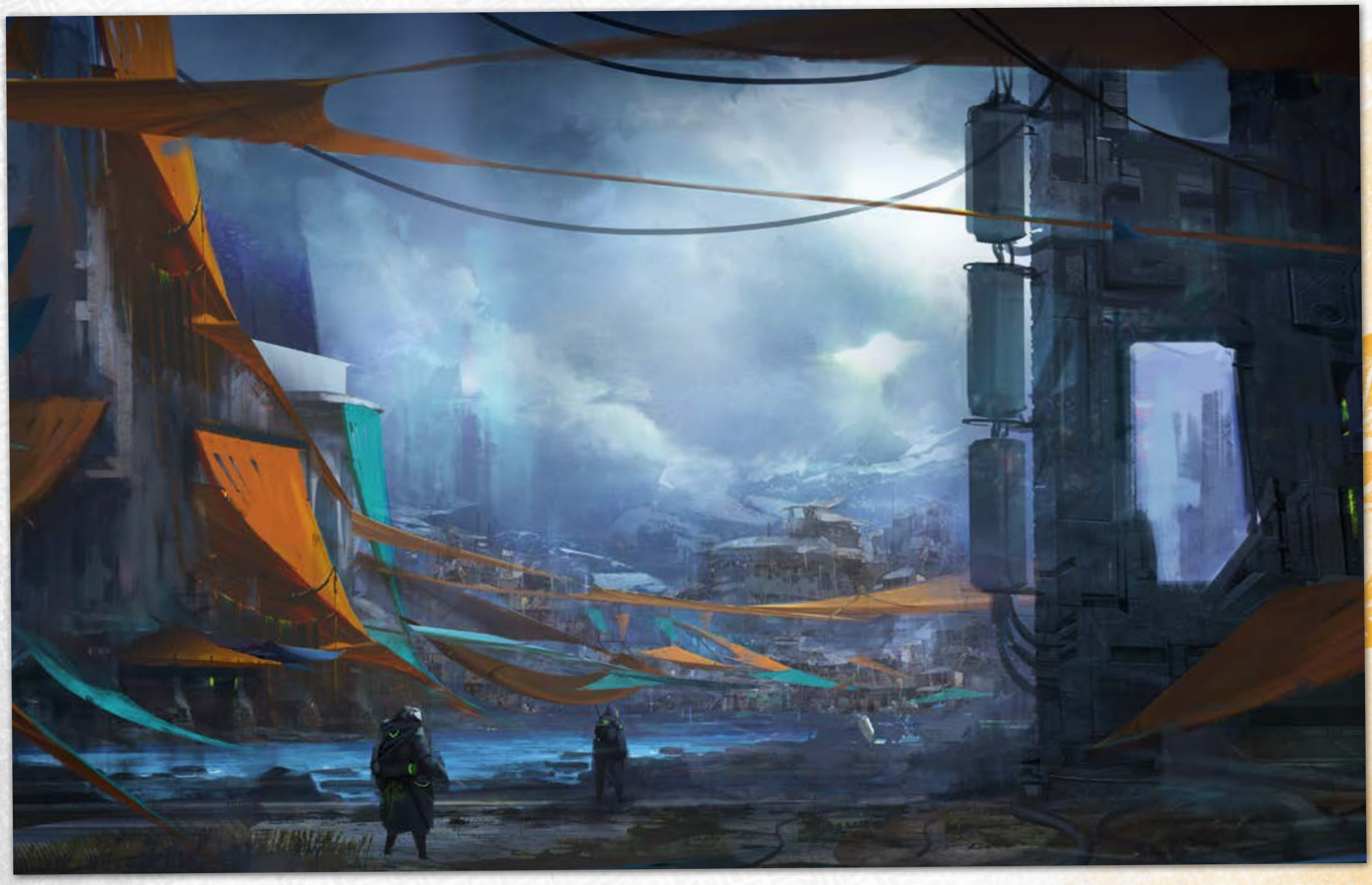
14 - THE SPYGLASS STATUE

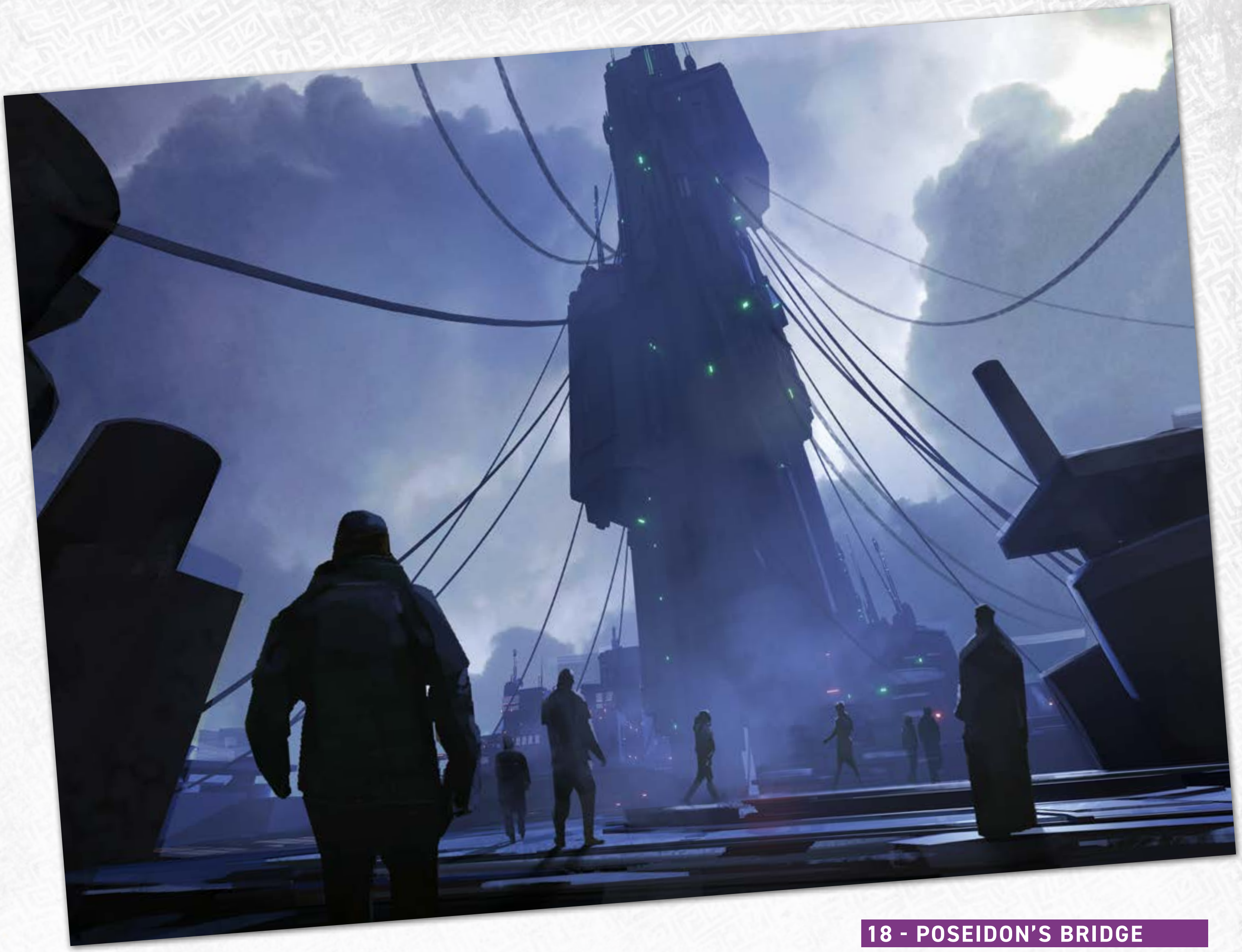
A statue of a woman with a spyglass watching the sky can be found in the windward edge of the mountains. On a windy day one can hear a howling echo blowing through it. Some kind of chamber beneath the statue, perhaps?

15 - FLOODED VEHICLE DEPOT

Located in the fork of the Grand Hyloft river, where it branches into the Wylera and Carspeth rivers, the depot has been flooded for years. Brave scavengers still rummage for parts but the wreckage is hazardous, and few Rivers will sail close.







16 - THE DREAMERS OF THE VIADUCT

The Dry Canal spans the gap between the Deepwoods Ridge to the east and the Tie-tie Heights in the form of a 10 mile long viaduct. Along its length there are wide service bays, where boats of old would pull in to allow others to pass. One of these 100 meter wide circular bays is home to a colony of Dreamers. They live a very simple life, and only one woman — Patrino Patrice — ever travels to New Mossgrove, and only when their community needs something vital. Some people talk of flooding the Dry Canal, but the Dreamers won't let their home be swept away.

17 - EXPOSED VACUUM TUBES

Just a year ago the ground shook and fell in upon itself, revealing two vacuum tubes, side by side. Running southwest to northeast, the tunnels seem to head north in the direction of the distant city of Emerta. 40 meters wide, these tubes once carried people and goods at supersonic speeds. One tunnel is completely flooded with grimy, black water, while the other is dry but dusty and cluttered with debris. Some people say they hear voices, growls, and other noises late at night, echoing within. Others believe that this is a safe way to walk to Emerta, if only a traveler were brave enough to make that long, dark walk.

18 - POSEIDON'S BRIDGE

Known locally as 'Poseidon's Bridge' this pre-War structure sometimes works, sometimes doesn't. The Everan love of elegance and reluctance to blemish the landscape led them to build the bridge to disappear beneath the water when not in use, leaving almost no trace of its existence.. Loci at either end warmly welcome travelers who want to cross and raise the bridge on demand, its glorious architecture rising from the waves. But now it doesn't work too well: sometimes it only raises partway, other times it leaves gaps in the structure that have to be negotiated. There's no point complaining to the Loci, they will only get angry at the lack of gratitude and lower the bridge again.

19 - ENERGY PYLONS

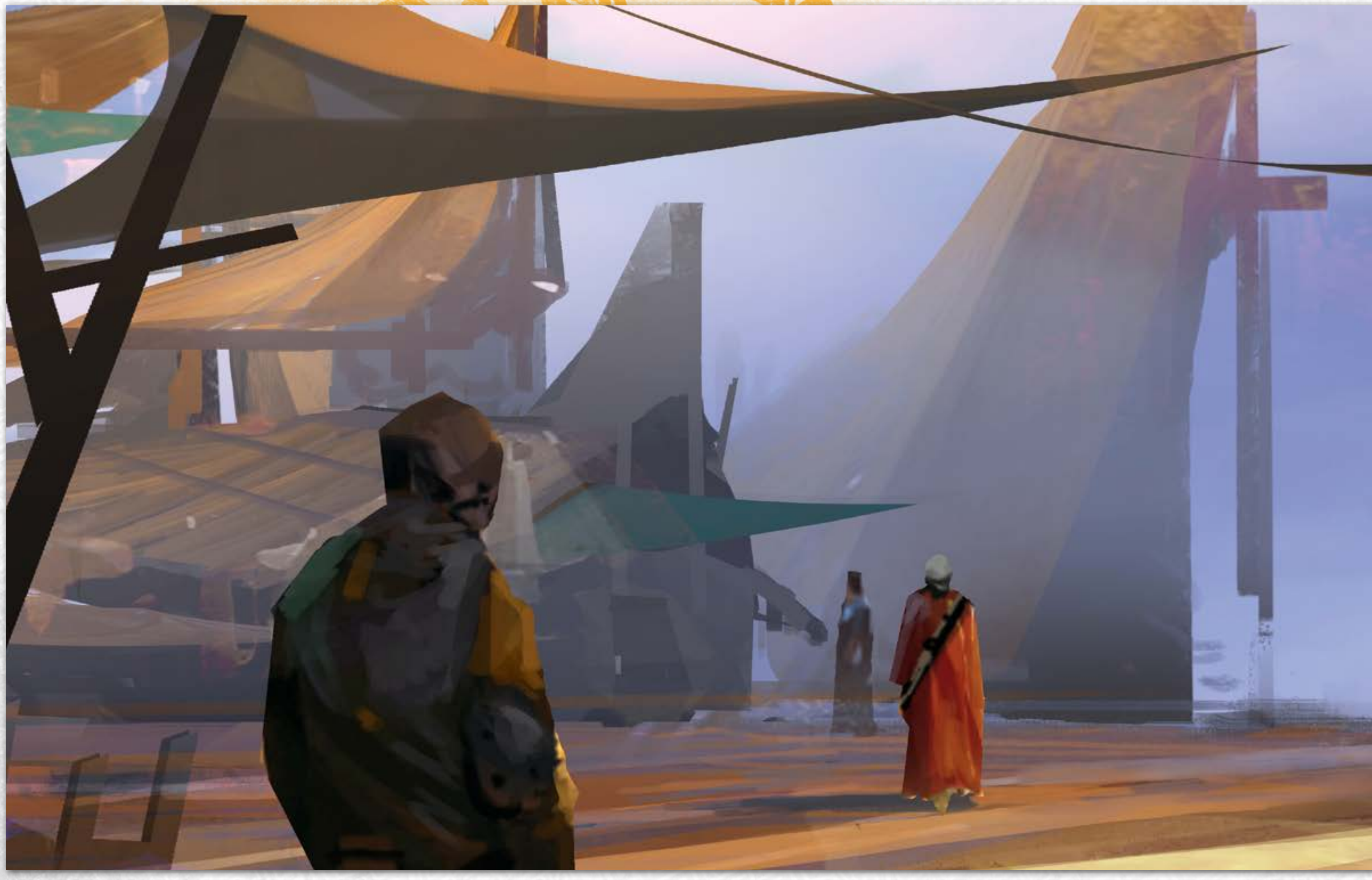
Spaced perhaps a mile apart, these pylons line the landscape to the east of New Mossgrove, marking out the borders of what was the Jendra-koi Wildlife Reserve. They once supported the invisible electric field that was the wall of the reserve, but most have been silent for years. Some still crackle with energy, and occasionally a section of shield restores itself, crackling with the smell of ozone and the sizzle of evaporating dew. Dangerous to the careless, Sentinels have been known to use these to their advantage, luring Wakers in and frying them. This is not without risk, however, not only is the field deadly, Wakers have been known to go berserk in its presence.

20 - THE CITY OF SANKTEJO

The minicity of Sanktejo — in that it is just ten kilometers across — literally sits on the Lower Hyloft river. The river flows under the city, beneath huge transparent plazas, boulevards, and colonnades. The city itself was the gateway into the Jendra-koi wildlife reserve, but is now battle-damaged and deserted. The river under the city itself is the province of the Rivers, who have explored and mapped all the tributaries, streams, becks, and branches that form an enormous watery maze. What they do there, and what secrets they hide, no one knows, and the Rivers won't tell.

21 - THE FIELD OF POETS

On the eastern side of the Poroko mountains lies the Field of Poets. Dozens of 50 meter tall bronze statues pose on huge plinths of stone, waiting for passers-by to stop and admire them. They then stand and recite tales to those who will listen. Many of these beautiful stories are indecipherable parables, some are witty ditties, others are moral tales of warning and woe. The Archivists say these 'poets' have much to teach the people of today, that the past foretells the future. Archivist groups often camp in the fields to hear and record every word spoken, whispered, or sung by these golems of the past. The odd Dreamer can be found here too, looking for some hidden wisdom.



Rumor has it, however, that these bronze giants cannot be trusted, that they can be controlled by rogue Weavers who implant their own nefarious messages.

22 - THE ANTIKVA HENGE

Just off the broken road to the west of New Mossgrove, old Everans built a giant replica of Stonehenge from Earth, with complex rings of old sarsons 75 meters tall — the Antikva Henge. This place quickly became the epicenter for the spiritually minded and those seeking psychedelic enlightenment. Activated by any Weaver with the right knowledge and understanding, they create music and dazzling displays of the most intense kind. Epicurean Archivists from Deepwoods are known to frequent here, trying to bring the singing stones back to life, but the Henge stands unmoved and quiet, waiting for a talented Weaver to awaken it again.

23 - THE CANAL TUNNEL

Running 60 kilometers from the southern end of the Poroko mountains to the northern point of the Reymont mountain range, this canal tunnel is dark, mysterious, and has never been successfully negotiated from one end to the other. The canal waters flow north, but no one knows what lies within. Some say that an entire undiscovered city lies under the mountains, that people still live there as Everans did before the War. Others, that the city is one of Wakers waiting to pour forth from the darkness and destroy what little civilization has been rebuilt. No one who's gone inside has ever been seen again, including the Spear team of Querikel Cossens, good friends to New Mossgrove.

24 - PRINTEMPO SETTLEMENT

Printempo is a small settlement protected by the lee of the hills to the east of New Mossgrove. It's home to a few dozen farming families and herders. They are experts with animals, and renowned for expeditions into the old wildlife reserve, to study and learn the ways of the creatures that call it home. Recently some have failed to return, and others have come back with fevered tales of unnatural beasts.

There is talk of a need to repair and restart the Reserve fences, to keep these abominations back.

25 - SOLECO CAMP

Soleco Camp is inhabited by those who fear the ruined mech at New Mossgrove, but don't wish to travel too far away from the market and rivers. They have done good work repairing the south road from New Mossgrove, but feel unappreciated. So much so they have recently erected toll gates on the road, to charge for road upkeep. Many think this is a shame-faced attempt to extort money from weary travelers, and it will come to an angry head sooner or later.

26 - THE CITY UNDERBELLY

In the desolate ruins of Kasteel part of the ground has literally been torn away. This mile long rend has revealed the irradiated underbelly of the once great city, skittering with the tiny feet of vermin, echoing to the low growls of mutated beasts, and the shuffling of something perhaps more human. Along with these dangers, numerous opportunities have been revealed. Spiral storage facilities holding supplies of all kinds if only one could reach them; energy sinks waiting for someone to tap their enormous resources; isolated machines, husbanded by Loci, running all kinds of scientific experiments. One thing is for sure, the Thralls know of this place.

27 - AKRITI HERDING GROUNDS

Across the grassy Southern Plains the herds of small tree-like Akriti can be found. These herds, sometimes numbering tens of thousands, follow set routes through these grasslands in tune with the seasons and weather. Equipped with voracious roots and clipping appendages they are all-but impossible to stop, remorselessly consuming everything in their path. Recently something has upset their rhythm and set them on a different course, one that has been getting ever closer to inhabited regions. Both Printempo and Soleco Camp have come under threat. And what if these herds crossed the hills and threatened New Mossgrove itself? How could they be stopped?

28 - HELL'S GATE

A notorious feature of the Dorinda Wasteland, a huge metal door, 50 meters across, set into the ground. What lies beneath it no one knows, but the dense metallic surface can't be scratched and no way below has yet been found. Some old Spears say it opens during the night, foretold by the deep and distant sound of turning cogs and the scrape of metal on metal. Some even claim to have crawled to its edge and looked below. These individuals never speak of what they have seen, they just answer the question with a single muttered word... "hell".

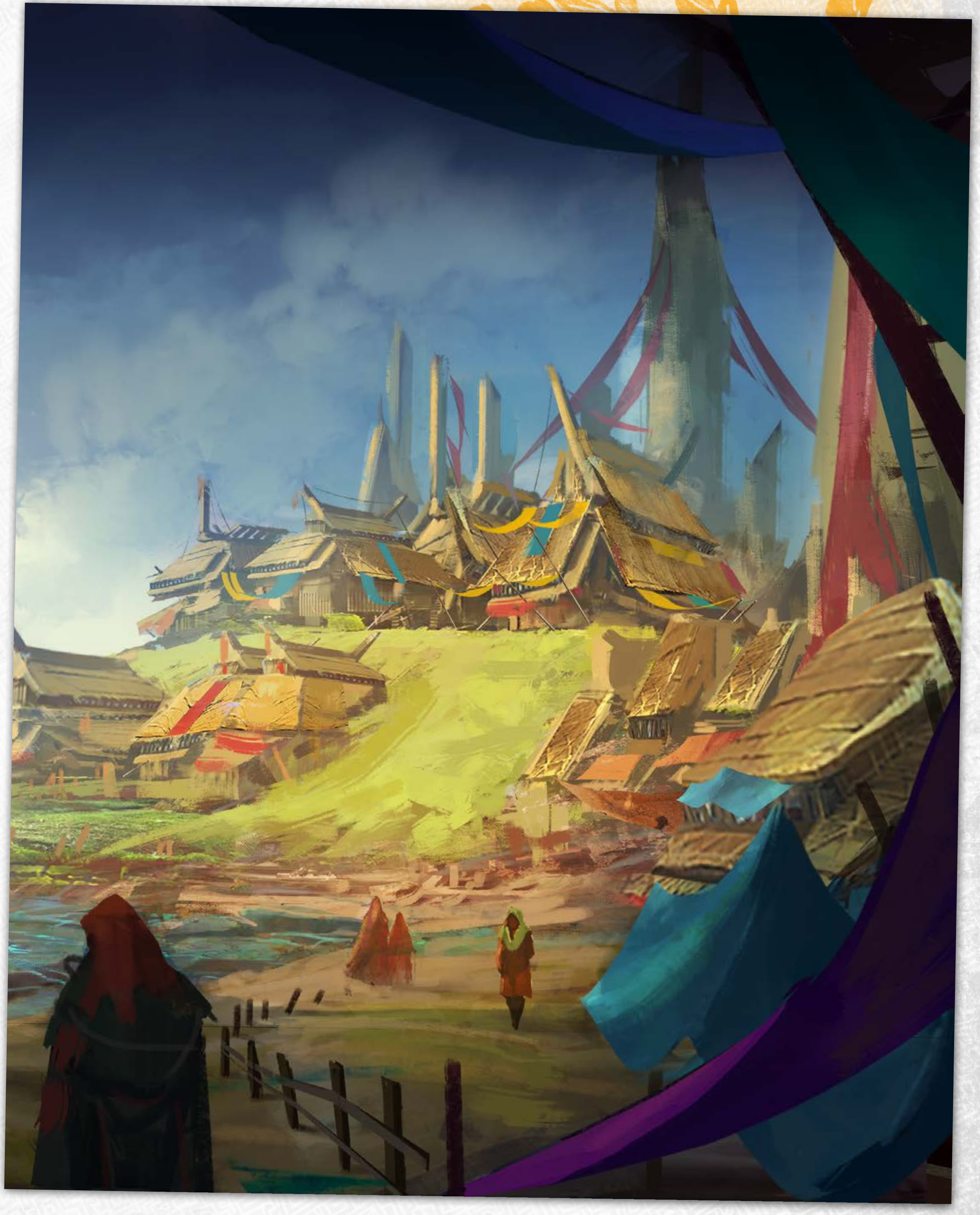
I'll probably stay far away from here!

29 - THE REFUGE

On the lower slopes of the Southern Plains sits the Old Smoke, a dormant volcano. The ancient lava tubes and now-cold magma chambers made a perfect series of smooth tunnels, in which Everans took refuge during the War. Ever since then these tunnels have been occupied, and known as the Refuge. Recently rumors have spread that new chambers have been found deep below the volcano, that the old Everans used their technology to 'tap-off' the volcano's lava and artificially make it dormant. In the wrong hands that tap could be released, unleashing the Old Smoke in all its ancient fury.

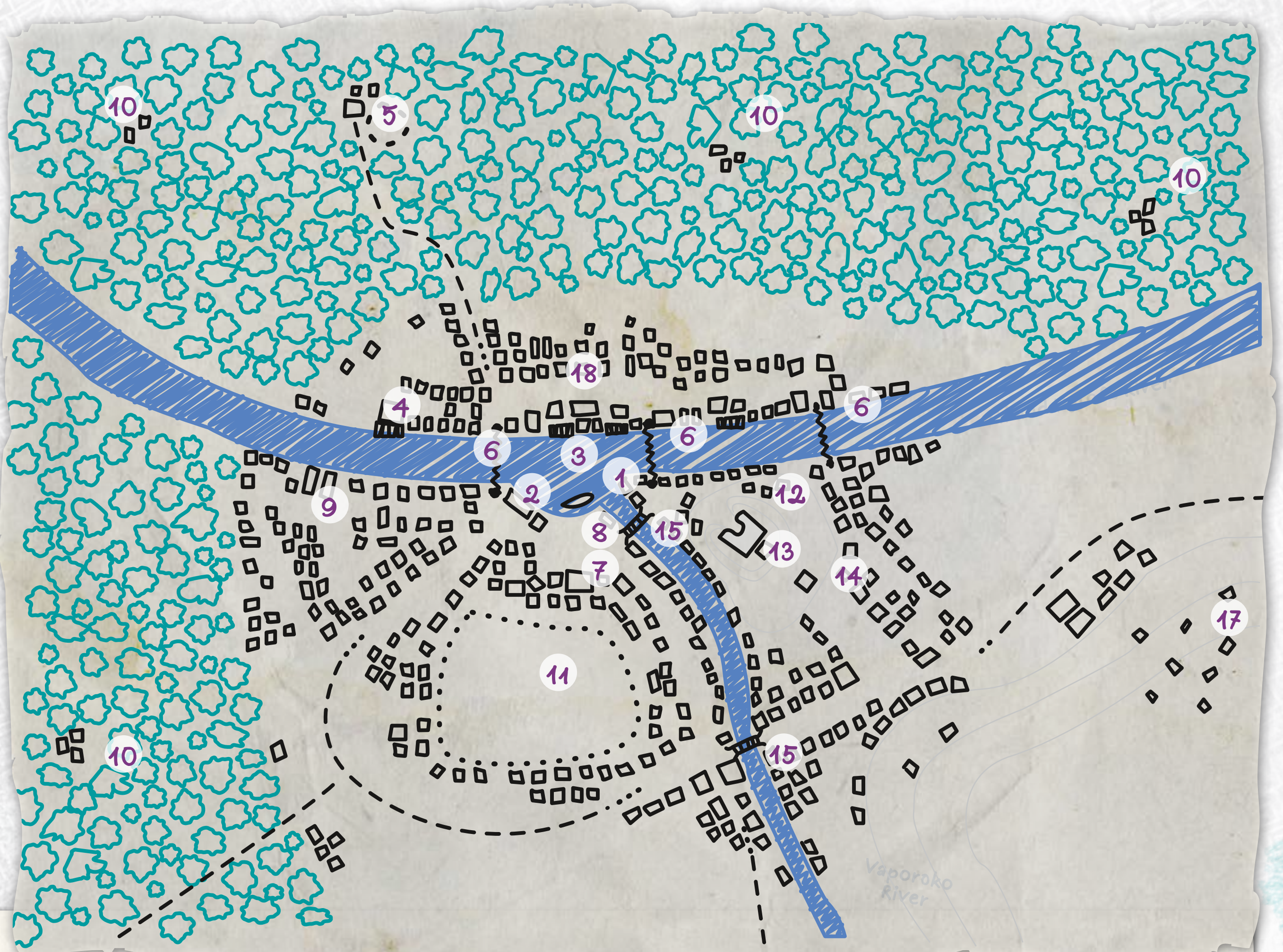
30 - LOS RIOS

Before the War, the mega-resort of Los Rios once stood where two great rivers met, creating a lush, radiant shoreline. It catered to the wealthy, dazzling tourists with glittering shopping complexes, towering luxury hotels, and exclusive restaurants. Today the rivers have slowed to a trickle, and Los Rios is an assemblage of shattered buildings isolated between two enormous ravines. Long since abandoned to the elements, dust coats every surface, scattered debris blocks streets and walkways, and only wildlife remains.



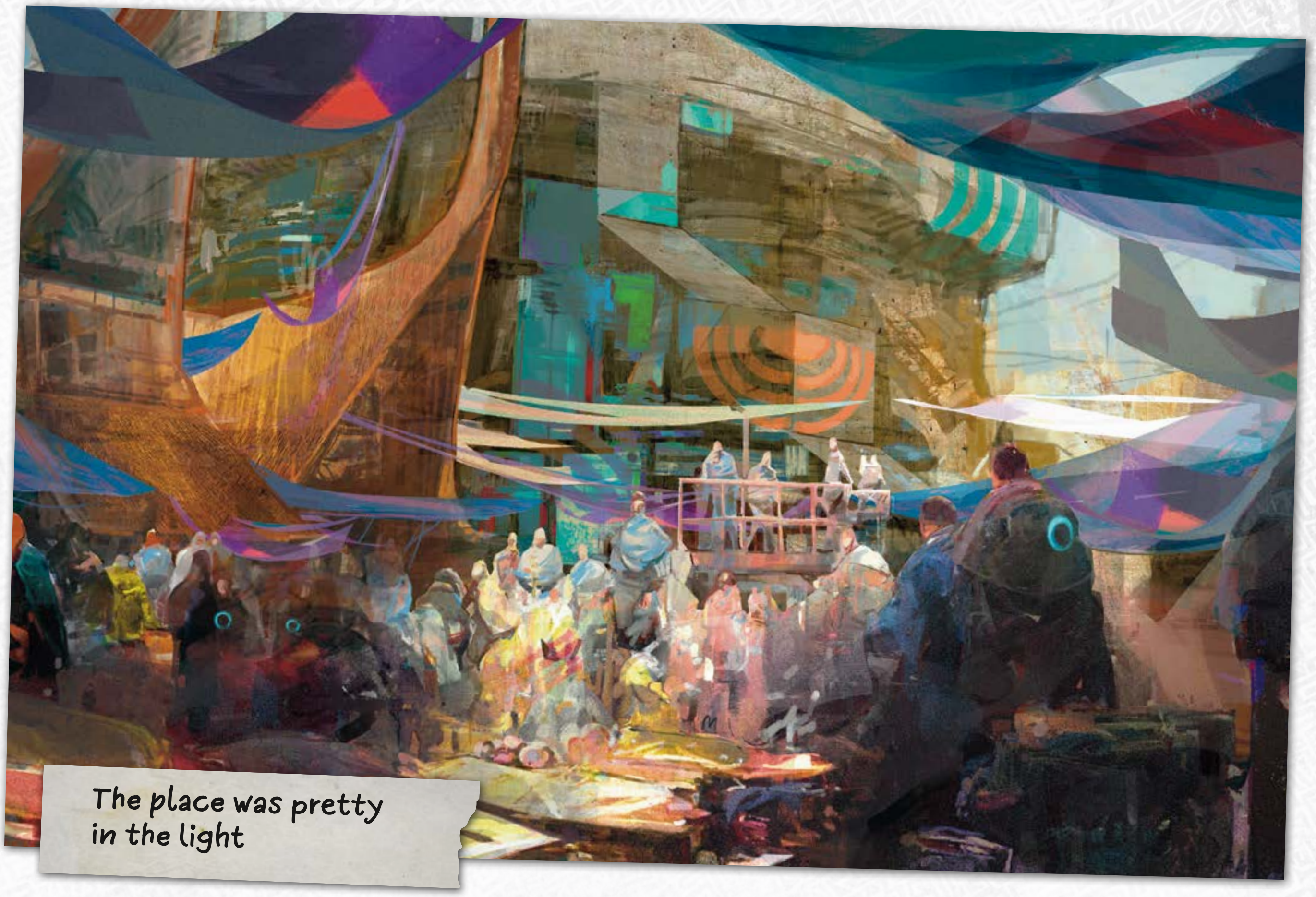
NEW MOSSGROVE

Nestled at the confluence of the Grand Hyloft and Vaporoko rivers, New Mossgrove is the epicenter of the region of Regis-Kasteel. The town has always been a magnet for those seeking a new start and those looking to explore the unknown. For those seeking a place in a growing community, New Mossgrove's farmers live on homesteads across the plains to the east, and the smaller settlements of Printempo and Soleco Camp are just fifty kilometers away, with Flint Crossing just another thirty kilometers beyond that. There is also the old Archivist community at Deepwoods, in the southern Poroko Mountains, and the new one at the water works of Padrol Tower in the hills to the north. The River-Spear meeting place of Porla Venko can be found up river and a Dreamer community, the Apidae Homestead, just fifteen kilometers down. For those looking for excitement and exploration, the destroyed city of Kasteel and the deserted minicity of Sanktejo are within a few days' travel and are just the tip of the iceberg, two jewels in a landscape brimming with artifacts, technology, knowledge, and dangers of the days gone by.



I think my map looks better!

1: Rivermaster Ironside's boat
2: Wayhouse Inn
3: Hyloft Tarn
4: Weaver's Workshop
5: Callisto's Lodge and Arena
6: Ferry chains
7: Barter Hall
8: Market Square
9: Salting barns
10: Forest gatherer lodge
11: The Old Sheep Pen
12: Sleeper's Hill and the mech
13: Guardian watchtower
14: New Mossgrove Files
15: Winch bridge
16: Barns and warehouses
17: Windmills
18: The Crafters' Bank
19: Livestock run



The place was pretty in the light

New Mossgrove's first settlers picked this place for the fertile ground alongside the rivers, the lush forest and rolling hills and meadows — that and the ready-made shelter of a giant mech, gratefully seized upon and occupied in the days before the Wakers. Sunken into the earth, the enormous excavator robot formed a welcoming cavern, warm, comfortable, and safe from the elements. No one lives under there now, and the mech has been buried and built over to form what has come to be called Sleeper's Hill, with the unspoken but lingering fear that it may one day awaken. That said, New Mossgrove's roots are so deep the community has conspired in a collective exercise of wishful thinking and finger-crossing, in the hopeful belief that this is one Waker that will never awaken.

With a population of about one thousand souls, New Mossgrove is a relatively safe hometown, a riverside marketplace, a stopover for those traveling the rivers or heading north into the wastelands, and a haven for those seeking refuge. The Everans of New Mossgrove survive by fishing the river, hunting and gathering the bounty of the forests, and farming the land. But life remains a struggle, and would be all-but impossible without the trade and influx of exotic supplies the Grabbers, Spears, and Rivers provide. The monthly market day, where boats fill the Hyloft Tarn and are lashed together to form a great market place both on land and on water, is critical to New Mossgrove's prosperity. All sorts are drawn to the settlement's characteristic houses and streets, built with dark local wood and a lofted slanting architecture, covered with colorful awnings, to protect from the sun and the rain. The town is always abuzz with activity.

Newcomers to New Mossgrove are usually pointed in the direction of the Wayhouse Inn, a dusty old barn on the south bank of the Grand Hyloft, converted into the best and most homely tavern in all Regis-Kasteel. The charismatic owner, Fionna Mowrie, makes everyone as welcome as an old friend not seen in years. Mowrie herself has lived in New Mossgrove all her long life, and she's known by all and carries a lot of clout — getting Fionna on your side is the best way to grease New Mossgrove's diplomatic wheels. The Wayhouse is the place to go if you're new in town, to swap stories, hear tall tales and find work.

Most newcomers are looking to trade, and for that they need the help of Rivermaster Ironside. Ironside is an old, old River who has given up the nomadic life, and moored his boat forever at New Mossgrove. He still lives aboard Ironside — he hasn't given up the water and could never bring himself to live on dry land — but otherwise is to all intents and purposes a citizen of New Mossgrove. From his position in the Hyloft Tarn the Rivermaster controls the water, tracking arrivals, departures, and cargo, making sure trade is smooth and easy. On the monthly market day he can be seen leaping from one vessel to the next, like a man fifty years his junior, lashing them together so even Dry Folk can come aboard and trade. He is not an unkind man, just intimidating — even the hoariest of old Rivers pay Ironside full respect. He never talks about his past, but the look in the eye of every River he meets tells its own story. Perhaps that history will catch up with him, one day.

One such River is Jesse, known as Navigator Samora after the River traditions. He passes through New Mossgrove more than any other River, as his daughter, Marisol, chose to marry one of the Dry People. In a desperate attempt to honor the River traditions, Marisol took the settlement's name instead of the boat's name, as would have been proper had she married another River. Now she goes by the name Marisol New Mossgrove, pleasing no one. Her husband Ramual is angry, and Marisol is having second thoughts about her decision to leave the river. Her father, Jesse, is always standing by, ready to help his daughter as soon as she comes to her senses about leaving the water.

Another who has given up the wanderer's life to settle in New Mossgrove is Spearmaster Callisto, a Spear with a fearsome and storied reputation. A warrior of the highest caliber, Callisto's bond-spear is adorned with tiny metal circles, each one a testament to a Waker defeated. Unlike the Rivermaster, Callisto has settled outside the village, in a lodge where she has built a small training arena. Spears from all over come through New Mossgrove to consult and train with her, bringing gifts in return for her expertise. These gifts include training loci — sparring nano-geists in the form of enemy warriors, wild and mutated animals, and even small mechs. The Spearmaster only rarely travels into the village itself, her needs taken care of by her apprentice, Cholo. When she does venture out it is usually to seek the help of the Archivists, Alta Tomera teni Soleca and Rango Shalah teni Soleca, or Weaver Markes, with re-programming a sparring nanogram.

Alta Tomera and Rango Shalah came to New Mossgrove ten years ago. Rumors abound that they were expelled from the Deepwoods Archive for some heinous offense. Their suffixes — teni Soleca — signify no connection with an Archivist group, something that's rare in the extreme. They usually use their old second names rather than teni Soleca, only using that name for official business. They kept their counsel and established the New Mossgrove Files, built on the hillside behind Sleeper's Hill. Here they collect and collate all the knowledge they can obtain, and offer it to the people of New Mossgrove, either as tales told under a starry sky, or in services, most notably medical. They cultivate good sources of information, such as the River known locally as Old Barza. He has been sailing these rivers since he was a child, making his rounds to many of the smaller settlements that don't offer enough trade opportunities to attract larger boats. He listens well, and hears much, and passes that knowledge to the Archivists in trade for books that tell exciting stories, to keep him entertained on his lonesome journeys.

On the north bank of the river lies New Mossgrove's industry, the so-called Crafters' Bank. Here the blacksmiths and forge masters, the coopers and tanners, and the mechanics and techs have their workshops. The industry is powered by a variety of sources, most visibly the three great waterwheels, honed to almost frictionless perfection by the skill of the Master Crafter Kalani Caw. Always skilled as a metalworker, Caw's knowledge has only grown over time, and now she is renowned for fixing the treasures brought home by the Grabbers and Spears, and getting a top return for them at the market. She has also developed such body strength that no one can beat her in a bout of arm wrestling, and Wycliffe Quarles, the leader of the settlement's Guardian militia, keeps trying to recruit her into his force.

Just down the river from Caw's workshop is that of the only Weaver in town — Violeta Markes. For generations, the Markes family was highly influential in the village, but Violeta is now the only Markes left, the others having disappeared some years ago. Recently, Markes accompanied the Grabbers to a vast underground complex and found the prize all Weavers dream of — a powerful Atoma. Unfortunately, it was guarded by a Waker, and in the process of escaping the Atoma's casing was cracked. Now it will only execute a small handful of commands. Violeta is determined to repair it, and she pays handsomely for any information that may help her in this quest. In the meantime, she works hard to build her Weaving skills, and helps the people of New Mossgrove when she can.

New Mossgrove is protected by a small group of Guardians. The Guardians of New Mossgrove are a volunteer militia established by Wycliffe Quarles, but he doesn't have enough volunteers or resources to make them a truly effective force. He's angry at the Sentinels, who should be protecting them, but never seem to be near just when needed.

Quarles has recently gained a new volunteer, a young trapper called Josep Li. Full of enthusiasm since he found an energy pistol in a discarded storage box deep in the woods, Li has been skipping work to practice, and follows Quarles like a dog. His eagerness is laudable, and Quarles touts the young man as an example to the rest of his militia. But that eagerness makes Li impatient and impetuous, and he's liable to take pot-shots at shadows, something that will get him, or New Mossgrove, into trouble one day.

Li notwithstanding, Quarles badgers the townsfolk to offer more help, but often makes more enemies than friends through his bombastic approach. He's always looking for an angle, and any new people coming into town are quickly taken to one side to get a lecture on the importance of defense. He also tries to keep friendly with any Grabbers in town, to get first dibs on any weapons or armor they might find.

New Mossgrove sports a pair of adventure-seeking Grabbers who scour the cities for interesting stuff. Mariel Quinn and her best friend, Glennah Verdad, are well liked by one and all. Mariel is reckless and bawdy, always ready for a drink, a dance or a fight. Glennah is quieter, leaving Mariel to make a splash while she works to fine-tune her trail bike. The pair maintain a list of requests from locals and make special efforts to locate any urgent needs. They are well known for being fair in their trades for whatever they find. When they return to spend a few nights at the Wayhouse, Mariel is always guaranteed to have a story or two to tell. Lately, they have been searching through a dried up lake bed about a day's ride from New Mossgrove where the loose soil has thrown up a lot of good salvage. However, on their most recent trip, they found footprints. A lot of footprints. An attempt to track them was futile, as they disappeared into the woods shortly after leaving the lake bed. But there's someone out there.

New Mossgrove is a collective community, working together to build a better future. It has a notional council, an informal group of important or prominent citizens, to whom difficult decisions can be brought who meet at the Barter Hall. At present the council is led by the village's Reeve, Samson Aguarda, as the oldest surviving elder of New Mossgrove. Not all approve of this, not least his twin brother, Reness, younger by only a few minutes, who decries his brother's aging judgment and presses to have Samson replaced — by himself. Few take Reness seriously, but he makes for raucous council meetings. Samson is joined on the council by Fionna Mowrie, Alta Tomera, Rivermaster Ironside, Wycliffe Quarles, and Violeta Markes. Callisto has been invited to join, but has shown no interest in doing so thus far.

Apart from dealing with big problems that arise, the council makes sure the settlement runs smoothly. The ferry chains are always attended to, to ferry folks across the Grand Hyloft or lowered to allow boats to pass; the winch bridges over the Vaporoko are working and ready to be raised. They frequently call community meetings in the Old Sheep Pen — once exactly that but now a gathering place for games, entertainments, proclamations, and justice.

CHAPTER 7

SECRETS IN LOST RIOS

You didn't hear it from me...

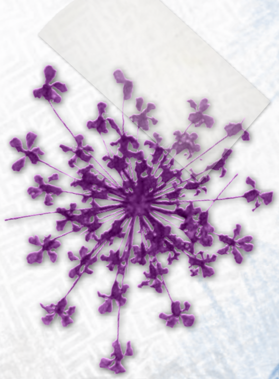
This adventure is designed as a perfect next step for players who've completed the adventure in the ***Dreams and Machine's Starter Set***, and will help you guide your players through their first exploration of the areas surrounding New Mossgrove. Many of the locations that you will visit are shown on the map on page 170.

It's recommended to read through this adventure first so you can get a feel for it and know where things are heading before starting a session with your players. Some of this information should not be known to players until you choose to make it so, so only the sections marked Read Aloud should be read out.

SYNOPSIS

After Archivist Tysha Ota recovers a recording of the last known whereabouts of her friend Dr. Samar "Sami" Tiju, she hires the player characters to track down what he attempted to uncover in the Dorinda Wasteland and to retrieve his remains for a proper burial.

I'm very good at keeping secrets!



ACT 1: A JOB IN NEW MOSSGROVE

Secrets in Los Rios picks up days after the Waker attack on New Mossgrove in the ***Dreams and Machines Starter Set***. If the player characters didn't play through that adventure, they arrive while the town is in the midst of recovery efforts.

Archivist Tysha Ota asks the player character to meet her at the Wayhouse Inn to discuss a job. Hoping they agree to bring the remains of her friend home, she explains what has happened to the sole survivor of Dr. Tiju's team, plays the audio recording, and offers cursory details on his unauthorized expedition. Not only does she want to bury her friend, but she would also like to know what was so vital that he built a team for a secret mission.

After negotiating the price of the job, the player characters prepare for a journey across the Dorinda Wasteland. They use New Mossgrove as a jumping-off point with the chance to trade and find out more information by talking to a few residents, including Fionna Mowrie, Renki Tomera, and Shalah Mogadishu.

ACT 2: HUNTING FOR DR. TIJU

The player characters meet the challenges of the Dorinda Wasteland on their way to Los Rios. Los Rios used to be a resort town nestled between the banks of two rivers. Now, it's mostly rubble located between two enormous ravines. They encounter harsh terrain, predators, bandits, and other hazards of the Waste.

They also happen upon a Spear's First Hunt, which gives the player characters the chance to learn about the Spear rite of passage and trade with the Cell. Finally, after crossing a ravine, they reach the crumbling ruins of Los Rios and meet a nano-geist named Simon.

ACT 3: A HEAP OF BROKEN THINGS

Once in Los Rios, player characters locate the office building that houses MERCY Division. They also locate the remains of Dr. Tiju and his team, and run into a group of Dark City Founders loading massive amounts of MERCY tech onto a cargo slide.

BACKGROUND

Padrol Tower is an Archivist community known for its Philanthropist founder, Estro Bruan Mercak. As a former member of the Deepwoods Archivist Council, he is firm in his philosophy and mission to repair Padrol Tower's water facilities. So, when Dr. Samar "Sami" Tuji approached him about a potential technological find in a fallen mega-resort, Estro Mercak dismissed the idea. He had neither the time nor the labor to spare.

A Philanthropist doctor with Ammeric (Amassau University Medical Research Centre), Dr. Samar Tiju, joined Padrol Tower to provide medical services. While they may have agreed initially on their Archivist philosophies, Dr. Tuji had become a bit of a Teleologist after listening to many of the Itso (Nedresita Information Technology Service Office) broadcasts. Outside the notice of other Padrol Tower community members, Dr. Tiju collected information and researched a theory he had about the fallen mega-resort of Los Rios.

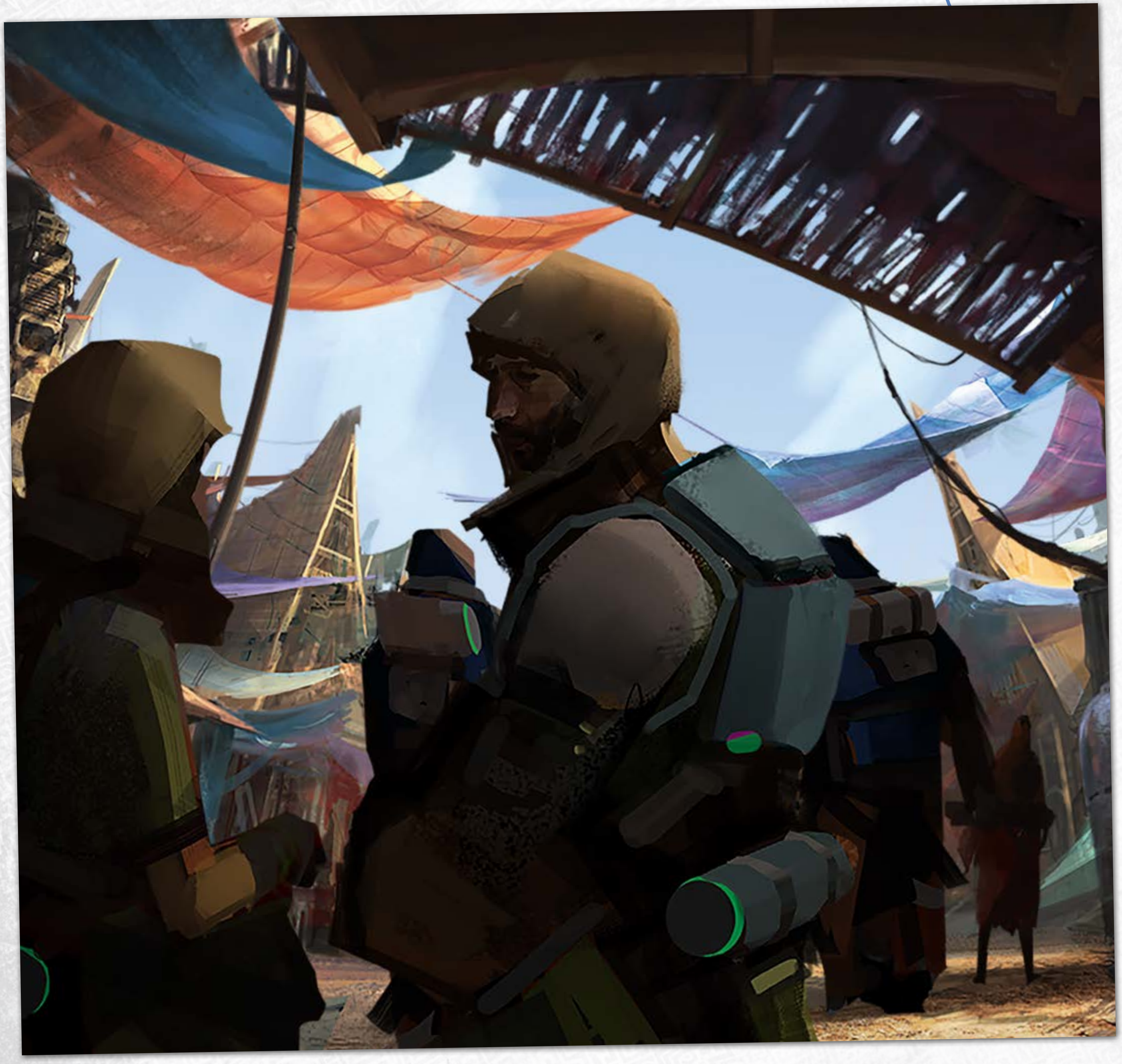
He pieced together clues that a secret division of the Everan Creation Foundation called MERCY was conducting experiments on Builder technology in case of unforeseen, catastrophic consequences. And he believed that within the data storage towers stored at the MERCY office in Los Rios, there was a Pre-War copy of the Builder. He intended to retrieve this Pre-War Builder and return Nedresita to the utopia it was before the war.

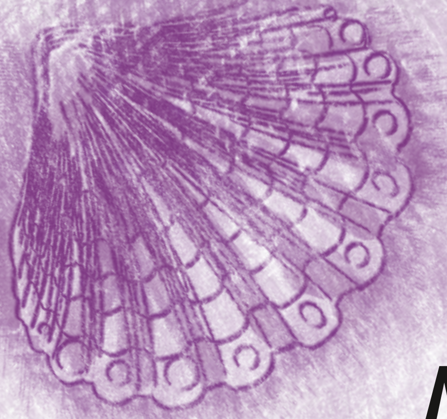
Given that his plans were incredibly controversial, he secretly traveled to New Mossgrove to hire a team of Grabbers to accompany him and protect him on the arduous journey. While the team managed to find the MERCY division office in Los Rios, they did not survive an encounter with a Waker. However, one of the Grabbers did manage to make it back to New Mossgrove before succumbing to her wounds.

THE LOS RIOS RECORDING

From the original team of four, only Jen Masali lived long enough to make it to New Mossgrove. Grievously wounded, the townsfolk assumed she was a victim of the recent Waker attack and took her to the Wayhouse Inn, where she died shortly after. In her personal belongings was a damaged recording from the expedition.

New Mossgrove





ACT 1: A JOB IN NEW MOSSGROVE

Well it's a good job we are here then!

INTRODUCTION

Typically, New Mossgrove bustles with riverside charm. Nestled on the banks of the Grand Hyloft and Vaporoko rivers, the port settlement is an epicenter of trade, usually filled with the raucous sounds of haggling vendors, the bang and clatter of dock workers unloading cargo, and children's laughter as they play on Waker Hill. Travelers confess with delighted smiles that they often hear New Mossgrove before seeing it. And that would likely be the case if today were an ordinary day.

But today is not an ordinary day for the peaceful settlement. Alongside the sound of the flowing river are the wails of grieving parents, the scrape and clomp of townsfolk clearing debris, and the low murmurs of rescue workers recovering the dead from collapsed buildings. A Waker attack has stolen the joy from this idyllic town. But the New Mossgrovians, courageous and resilient, refuse to let this tragedy break them.

Read Aloud
this sort of
text!

Player characters don't need to have played the adventure in the ***Starter Set*** to jump into this adventure. But if they did, note which buildings were destroyed in the fight and which non-player characters were injured so you can incorporate them into your description of New Mossgrove. If a location isn't available based on the outcome of the previous story, feel free to change locations.

For example, a scene in this section takes place in the Wayhouse Inn. In your adventure continuity, the Wayhouse Inn might be rubble. In that case, you can keep the scene at a demolished Wayhouse Inn or move the meeting to the Docks instead. However, because this adventure takes place a few days after the attack, the non-player characters have recovered enough to converse with the player characters.

ACT 1 OBJECTIVES & EVENTS:

Each act of this adventure provides objectives player characters must complete before moving to the next section, along with optional events that add complexity to the story. This at-a-glance highlights which scenes to prioritize when pressed for time.

- **A Friend in Need (Objective):** Tysha Ota hires the player characters.
- **The Wayhouse Inn (Event):** Player characters talk to Fionna Mowrie, the owner.
- **Volunteer Outpost (Event):** Player characters investigate Jen Masali's body.
- **New Mossgrove Files (Objective):** Renki and Shalah assist in locating Los Rios.

A FRIEND IN NEED

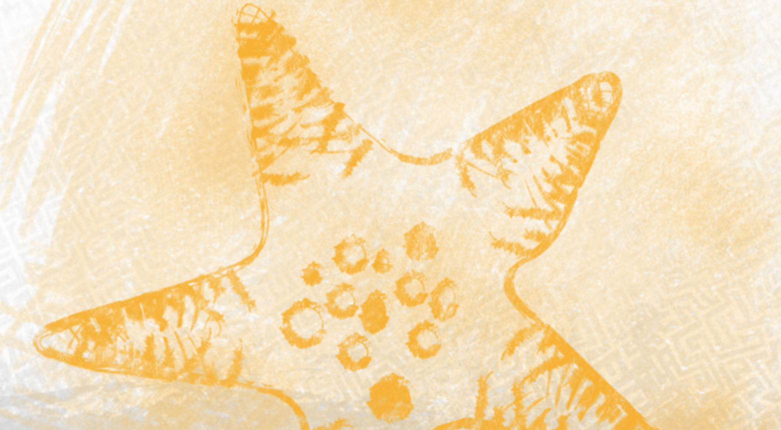
Tysha Ota, an Archivist from Padrol Tower, writes a note (**Knowledge Fragment A, page 211**) to the player characters asking them to meet her at the Wayhouse Inn. She's heard good things about them and hopes they will help her find her friend.

Dusk falls on New Mossgrove while Tysha Ota waits patiently on the bench outside the Wayhouse Inn. Just as she wrote in her note, she's wearing a bright yellow dress that shines even in dimmed light. She stands when the player characters close the distance. After thanking them for meeting her, she introduces herself.

If the Wayhouse Inn remains intact, she invites the group in for a drink. If the Wayhouse Inn is in ruin, she invites them to walk with her toward the docks.

The brightly painted Wayhouse Inn is about the size of a small barn and rustic, even by New Mossgrove standards. But its flaws, food, and lively music make it a local favorite. With so many homes damaged, the downstairs pub is full to bursting with townfolks and their children grabbing a meal. Tysha squeezes past a crowd to find a table near the kitchen.

Once seated, Tysha slides a charcoal sketch (**Knowledge Fragment B, page 211**) of Dr. Samar Tiju across the table.



TYSHA OTA

ARCHIVIST		DEFAULT	
12	3	8	1

WEAPONS

Shock Prod (melee): Shocked 3 or Stunned 3, Powered

ACTIONS

GLIF: Protect: Tysha spends 2 Threat and applies a GLIF to a person or object. A machine which sees that GLIF protects that person or object.

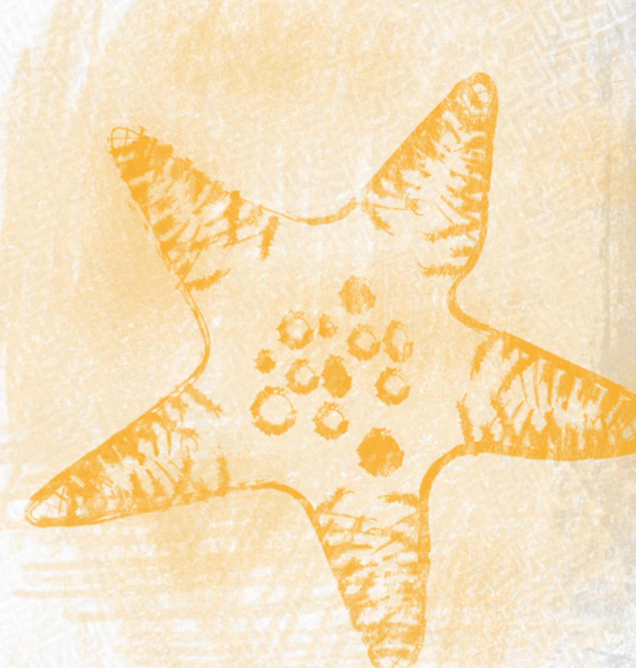
SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Jury-Rig: When making a Skill Test to repair a mechanical or electronic device, Tysha may choose to automatically pass the Test by adding 2 Momentum.

Observant: Whenever a PC spends one or more Momentum to *Obtain Information* in Tysha's presence, they may ask one additional question. Tysha may ask for compensation, no more than 1 coin or 1 Supply Point to use this ability.

TYSHA OTA

A Philanthropist Archivist from Padrol Tower, Tysha Ota met Dr. Samar Tiju after a strut snapped while working on the tower, causing her to fall and break her leg. Unable to walk for weeks, she assisted him in his makeshift clinic as she healed. While working together, they fell into a warm rapport, and the two colleagues realized there was more between them than professional interest. Neither of them had declared their feelings before he went missing. Shy about her affection for Sami, and unaware of his regard for her, she insists on referring to him only as a "friend."



Tysha reveals to the player characters that Sami had been working on a private project for years. But, only in the last few months did he seem to be preparing for something.

> *"He had become somewhat captivated by Builder War conspiracy theories. Ok, I'm not being entirely honest. He was obsessed with them. And I told him I thought he was listening to too much Itsu. You know how some of those broadcasts can be, right? But I never imagined he'd go so far as to hire a team to go on a secret mission with him to the Wasteland."*

At this point, she plays the recording recovered from Jen Masali, the member of Dr. Tiju's team who made it back to New Mossgrove before dying (**Knowledge Fragment C**, page 212)

After the recording finishes or the players have a chance to read the transcript, Tysha asks for the player characters' help.

"Sami, well, he was a very dear friend. And he meant so much to the people of Padrol Tower. It sickens us to think he's just lying there somewhere in the Wasteland for the vultures... or worse. And think of these Grabbers' families who probably have no idea what has happened to them. I'm asking for your help to retrieve his remains and, if possible, find out why he went out there."

Once the player characters settle on the terms of the job, Tysha gives them a fragile piece of paper in a protective sleeve (**Knowledge Fragment D, page 212**). She confesses she searched Sami's room in Padrol Tower, and this was the only clue she could find.

Tysha buys a round of drinks or a quick supper for the table if they want to stay and chat. Otherwise, the player characters can do local detective work to learn more about Dr. Tiju's mission and where Los Rios is located.

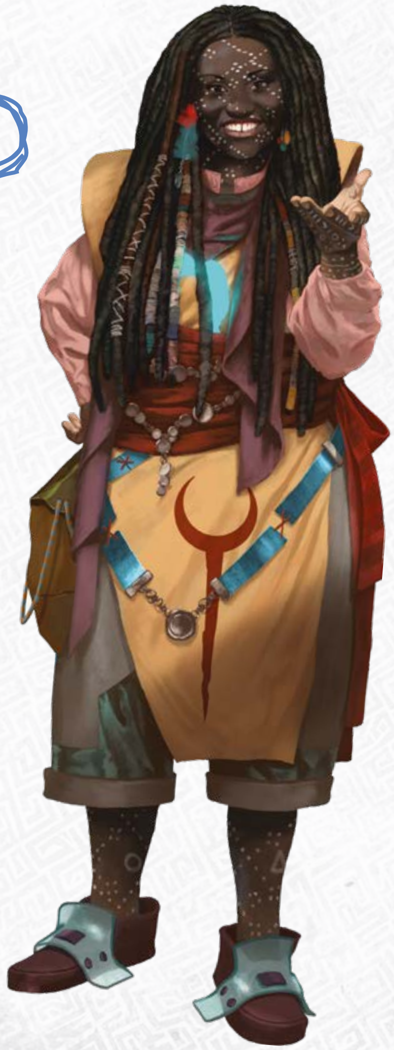
NEGOTIATING THE DEAL

Tysha doesn't have much to pay the player characters with, so she first attempts to appeal to their better angels. While legitimately grieving her friend, she's not opposed to using the sympathy the characters might feel to her advantage. She doesn't offer payment if the player characters volunteer for the expedition.

However, if they are shrewder negotiators, Tysha barters over the cost of their help. Have the player characters roll an opposed **Quickness (Talk)** or **Resolve (Talk)** Test against Tysha. If the player characters fail, Tysha settles firmly on ten Supply Point's worth of equipment per player character (in whatever she can provide from Padrol) upon their return. If the player characters succeed, Tysha agrees to four Supply Points now and eight once they complete the mission and offers food and rest for them to recover.

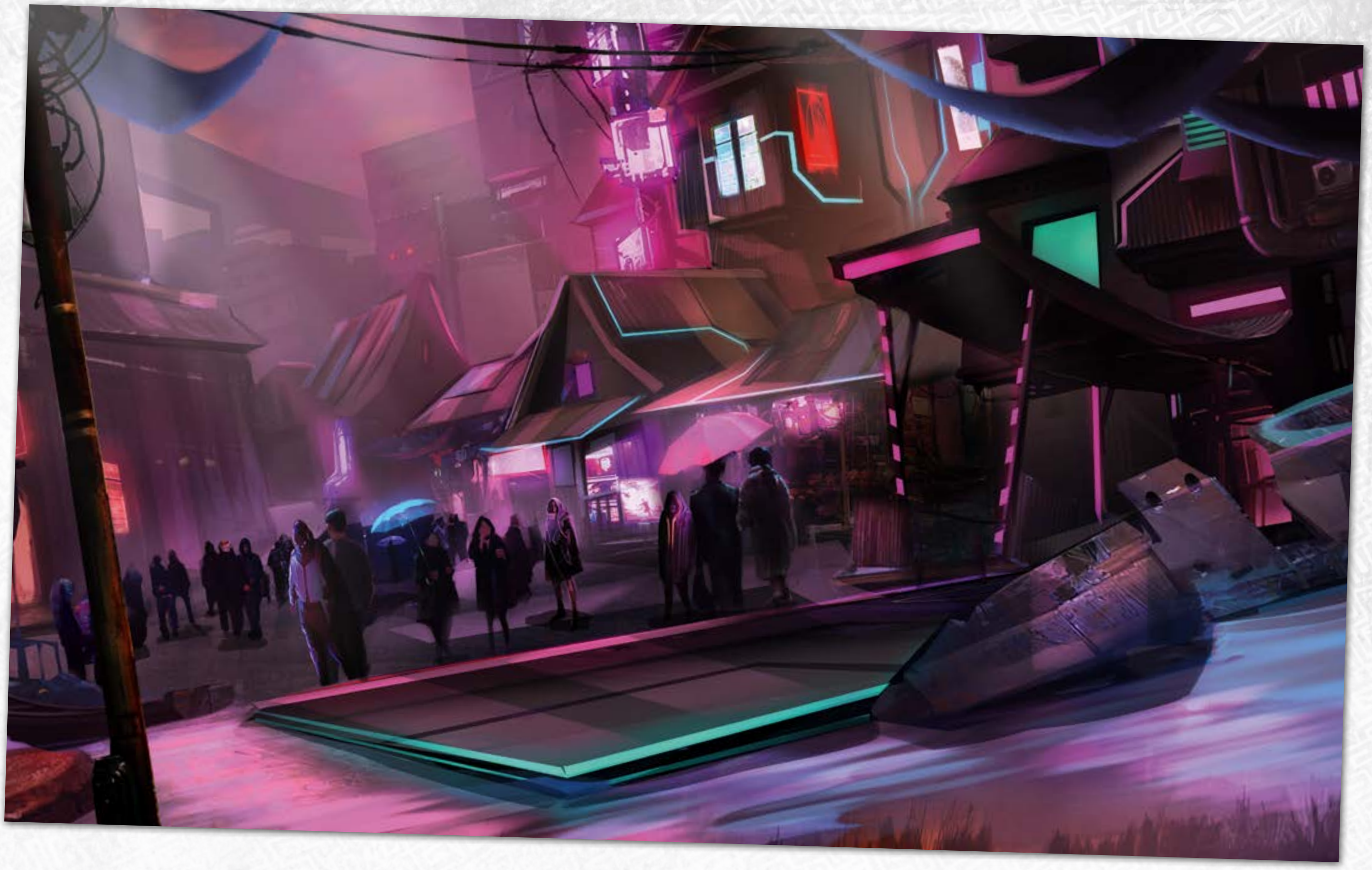
In either case, Tysha adds that the Archivists at Padrol Tower are specifically interested in the technology Dr. Tiju had been attempting to acquire, and she expects them to turn it over to her. Anything else they find during the journey is theirs to keep or trade.

Fionna



Hummmmm OK I guess...

It's a deal!!!



THE WAYHOUSE INN

After the player characters finish the conversation with Tysha, they may want to speak with Fionna Mowrie, owner of the Wayhouse Inn and the last person to see Jen Masali alive.

> *Fionna is a black woman, tall and lean, with a pattern of white dots tattooed on her face. Even though her right arm is in a sling, her smile is undaunted. "Welcome, friends. What are we drinking?" She quirks an eyebrow as she tosses a couple of woven reed coasters on the bar.*

Fionna can answer basic questions about the town and point out vital places in New Mossgrove.

- **The New Mossgrove Files:** Located off the town square near Waker Hill, the New Mossgrove Files is the town's library curated by the Archivists Renki Tomera and his assistant Shalah Mogadishu.
- **The Docks and Riverside Market:** Jesse Samora, a likable bon vivant and one of the Wayhouse Inn's favorite patrons, is the guy to talk to for trade and odd jobs.
- **Wycliffe Quarles' house:** The local militia leader is a former Guardian named Wycliffe Quarles. Folks usually give him a hard time for his grumbling and paranoia, but he seems to have been proven right for now, given the Waker attack. Presently, he's helping lead cleanup efforts.

On a successful **Resolve** (**Talk**) Test, Difficulty 1, Fionna answers questions about Jen Masali and her team.

"They aren't locals, but that Grabber team occasionally comes through during busier market times. I saw them talking to someone I've never seen in these parts a few days ago. We thought Jen was one of the Waker victims at first. It wasn't until Tysha got here that I realized this was something else. Don't know that it would've changed things. She was in bad shape. Best we could do here was make her comfortable. She died two nights later."

If the player characters inquire about Jen's belongings or body, Fionna directs them to an outpost on the edge of town where the corpse removal volunteers are trying to reunite families with their dead loved ones.

Unfortunately, she doesn't have much information on Dr. Tiju specifically.

"Didn't recognize him. And given how he acted, you'd think this was his first time in town. Strange one, that guy. Do you know those folks who get so focused on their own business that they forget anyone else exists? Yeah, that's the kind of customer he was. But his money spends as good as anyone else's, so I didn't pay him much mind."

VOLUNTEER OUTPOST

A somber mood has settled on the people of New Mossgrove. And there is no place more sorrowful than the Volunteer Outpost. In the days after the Waker incident, most of the town pitched in to help rescue people. Some were buried under their homes' broken beams and rubble and others fell into the rushing river. But after the volunteers had rescued survivors, rescue operations became recovery missions to retrieve the remains of those who had died.

The outpost is a lean-to shack hastily constructed on the outskirts of town. It sits next to a long wall which is equally improvised. Pieces of paper tacked to it flutter in the breeze. The papers are sketches of people and notes looking for family members or lost pets.

Beyond the shack, a row of canopy tents keeps the sun off covered bodies laid shoulder to shoulder. Regardless of the hour, the outpost is busy with folks hoping to find or identify lost loved ones and relatives weeping over the remains of their mothers, fathers, and children. The smell of death hangs heavy in the air.

The town undertaker stands at the shack with a clipboard, keeping records of names and personal effects while assisting families with funeral arrangements. He points the player characters toward one of the canopy tents with five bodies.

With a successful **Insight** (**Study**) Test, they recognize a corpse fitting the description of Jen Masali. Her body is in rough shape, with wounds clearly caused by a Waker. She still wears the clothes she died in, though the blood stains have dried. Tucked by her thigh is a bag with all her belongings.

Player characters attempting to search her belongings must succeed on a **Quickness** (**Sneak**) Test with a Difficulty of 3. If they fail, the undertaker stops them. He explains that only relatives can remove items from the dead and asks for proof of their relationship to the deceased. The player characters can attempt an Insight (Talk) Test with a Difficulty of 4. If they succeed, they can leave with Jen's belongings. But if they fail, the undertaker waves over two burly volunteers to help him deal with the graverobbers.

GRAVE ROBBERY

Given how habitual it is in gaming to loot bodies, your players may not realize they are committing a crime. You may want to alert them to this before they decide to rob Jen Masali of her belongings. If they choose to proceed and succeed, they will find:

- A well-made Knife
- Domestic Binoculars
- Industrial Bolt Cutters
- Synth Rope
- 2 Supply Points worth of salvage
- A coin purse with 3 coins

Should the undertaker catch them and call over the burly volunteers, the player characters can hand over Jen's belongings and walk away, or they can press their luck. If the next scene becomes a social challenge, fight scene, or chase, the volunteers intend to arrest the group. If they fail to evade capture, the player characters spend a night in the New Mossgrove jail.

The jail is a stone structure about the size of a small cottage used more as a drunk tank than a place to confine hardened criminals. If the characters can't free themselves before the next day, Tysha intercedes. She pays a fine of 2 coins and convinces the authorities to let them go. She also informs the characters that she'll deduct the cost from their final pay.

OTHER LOCAL CONTACTS

If the player characters know other locals, they might talk to them based on successful Skill Tests.

- **General townsfolk:** They won't have much to offer and are more concerned with the town's tragedy. But if the players need a hint to get them to the New Mossgrove Files, they can tell them to "go talk to Renki if you need to know something."
- **Marketplace Traders:** Traders near the marketplace confirm Dr. Tiju was a stranger to town, but they could have tidbits to offer about the three Grabbers — Bucki, Izu Chavez, and Jen Masali.
    - **Izu Chavez:** Leader of the Grabber trio, Izu Chavez is a young man with dark hair and a winning smile who does most of the talking when negotiating a job. Traders describe him as a hard bargainer who never takes the first price. Last anyone saw him, he was headed to the Wayhouse Inn.
    - **Jen Masali:** A cheerful, athletic brunette with an elaborate neck tattoo of a native tree's deciduous autumn branches. Last time she was in town, she traded at the market for a microrecorder.
    - **Buckie:** Dark-skinned with a stocky build, they are usually interested in weaponry. They tend to prefer guns, but won't say no to an intriguing blade. One of the Rivers overheard them talking about how the trio was living hand to mouth and that this next job needed to be a game changer.
- **Archivists:** Deepwoods Archivists can fill in details about Padrol Tower. They may also have heard rumors about Dr. Tiju and know him by reputation. Anytime Dr. Tiju comes up, the Archivists look uncomfortable. They don't want to speak ill of the dead, but it also seems like he might have been up to no good. They can also direct the player characters to the New Mossgrove Files.

THE NEW MOSSGROVE FILES

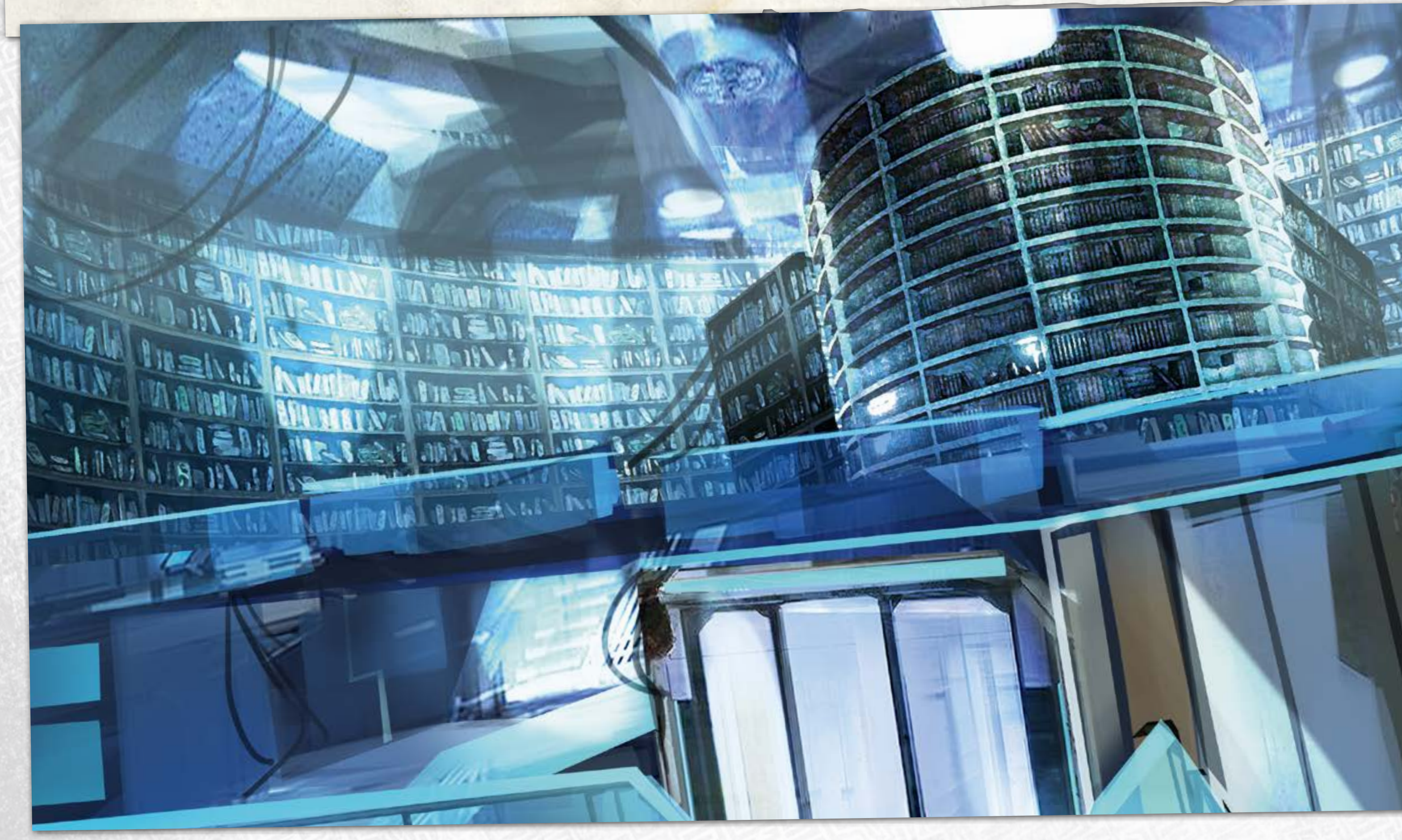
At the New Mossgrove Files, player characters can reacquaint themselves with Renki Tomera and Shalah Mogadishu or meet them for the first time. Again, you may need to adjust the location description if the player characters participated in the Waker fight or if the New Mossgrove Files was destroyed in the ***Starter Set*** adventure.

The New Mossgrove Files is a sight to behold. It's a veritable cornucopia of chunky tech, documents, and bits and bobs. There doesn't appear to be any rhyme, reason, or organization to the material, but the two curators seem to have no issue finding what they need.

Renki Tomera is the senior Archivist and curator of the New Mossgrove Files. He is a frail, stooped man with a pronounced hump who walks with the assistance of a cane. The bandage wrapped around his forehead looks freshly changed. Hearing you enter, he leans toward the door as if looking at you with his ear. Somewhat shy and soft-spoken, he strokes his long grey beard and shuffles over. "Is there something-"

"Master, please! You should be resting!" Shalah emerges from behind one of the stacks. Much younger than Renki, she buzzes across the room to catch up to him. "I've asked you to stay in bed." But the old man flaps his hand at her like it's all much ado about nothing.

"I can rest when I'm dead." Turning his milky eyes to you, he sniffs. "Have you been here before? What can we help you find?"



Renki knows more about Dr. Tiju than Shalah. They were both interested in Waker technology, and while he respected Dr. Tiju's passion for the subject, he disapproved of Samar's obsession with the Dark City.

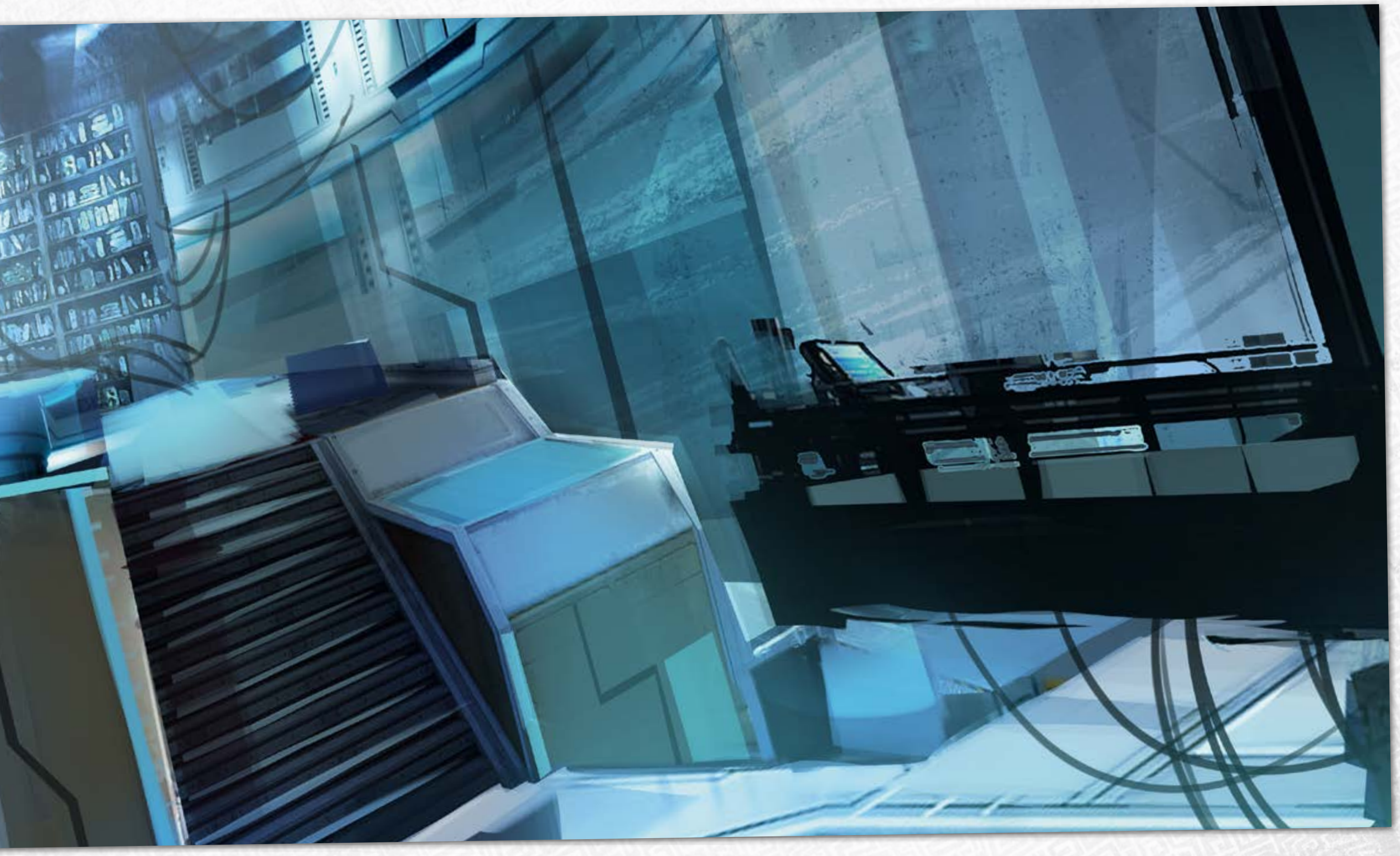
Additionally, Renki buys Knowledge Fragments for 1 coin while Shalah provides basic first aid and rest to gain Spirit for 1 coin. Shalah can also exchange each coin the player characters give her for 1 Supply Point. If player characters attempt to sell Jen's Supply Points, Shalah purchases them, unaware they came from her corpse.

Renki can also help the player characters find Los Rios. He's sure he has an Old World map somewhere, but there is no way he'll let the PCs leave with it for free. They must pay a deposit of 2 coins. If they don't have the coins or don't want to pay a deposit, each PC can roll an **Insight (Study)** Test with a Difficulty of 3 to attempt to memorize it. A PC with a communicator can also take a picture of the map.

The Dorinda Wasteland is treacherous and disorienting. Without a map, the player characters could easily get lost on their way to Los Rios

- If the PCs pay Renki's deposit, Difficulties won't increase, and they don't start Act 2 with any Complications.
- If the PCs Study the map, for each failure, the Move Difficulty in Part 2 increases by 1 or you can apply the *confused* complication to Insight rolls.
- If any PC has a skill or talent that could apply to artistic talent, navigation, or excellent memory, a successful **Insight** (**Study**) Test with a Difficult of 2 negates one player character's Study failure.

With successful **Insight** (**Study**) Tests, the PCs comb through the library with Shalah's help. They learn Los Rios was originally a mega-resort located south of the Canyon Shelter inside the fork of two ravines. Known for luxury and leisure, it doesn't seem like a natural destination for an Archivist hunting Old World tech.



ACT 2: HUNTING FOR DR. TIJU

I've heard good doctor is hard to find!

INTRODUCTION

Between New Mossgrove and Los Rios lies the Dorinda Wasteland, a roughly flat plain once populated by multiple urban boroughs. The cities have long since fallen, destroyed by Wakers, picked clean by Everans, and consumed by vegetation. A desolate place, only foolish or recklessly brave adventurers hike the Wasteland, usually in large groups.

Following the Grand Hyloft River, the trek meanders through the wilderness. With a mixture of deciduous and coniferous trees, the area is relatively safe and home to several communities, including Callisto's Lodge and the Guardian's Ruin. The dried lakebed marks the Dorinda Wasteland's southern border.

The empty basin is four kilometers long and a quarter of a kilometer deep, filled with jagged rock and patches of mud. Near its center, half buried in the earth, is the rusting carcass of a sailing vessel. Scavengers have picked its skeletal remains clean, and now it only serves to remind those who pass it of a time before the Builder War. Hundreds of small strips of colored cloth hang from its corroded hull, placed there by young Everans looking to prove their bravery.

4km?! We can't
go around it!
We'll have to go
through it!!!

Act 2 opens at the dead lake. If the player characters want to tie a strip of cloth to the vessel's hull, they should make a **Quickness** (**Move**) Test with a Difficulty of 2. A failure results in a *sprained ankle* 1 Injury and the *frustrated* Truth.

ACT 2 OBJECTIVES & EVENTS:

The Dorinda Wasteland is a highly flexible setting that offers you a range of storytelling opportunities from tough terrain and torrential weather to wild packs of animals and dangerous Thralls. Act 2 provides a buffet-like selection of different obstacles and challenges.

- **Traversing Harsh Terrain (Objective):** Player characters cross the Dorinda Wasteland.
- **Rites of the Spear (Event):** A young Spear takes down her first Waker.
- **Arrival at Los Rios (Objective):** Player characters arrive at the edge of Los Rios.
- **The Fallen Shopping Complex (Event):** Simon the nano-geist appears.

TRAVERSING HARSH TERRAIN

Reaching Los Rios from the southern border of New Mossgrove takes at least two days in the best of circumstances. The crossing is punishingly arduous and should make even the bravest character question their choices.

> *As you begin your journey, a cracked stone street guides your path. Tall grass surrounds the road on either side and grows out of every crevasse. In the distance, patches of trees encroach on abandoned communities while slanted buildings stretch across the horizon. Vines engulf the dilapidated structures as if dragging them into the earth. And above the wild ruins, thick gray clouds block the hot sun and herald a coming storm.*
>
> *By midday, you spot the charred remains of a hovercraft torn to pieces by a Waker long ago. As you continue to follow a road, the vehicle is the first of many. Soon they populate the entire expanse, bumper to rusted bumper. You move between and climb over them until the ancient traffic jam and the road finally end at the edge of a massive crater — the remains of an aerial bombardment from two centuries ago.*

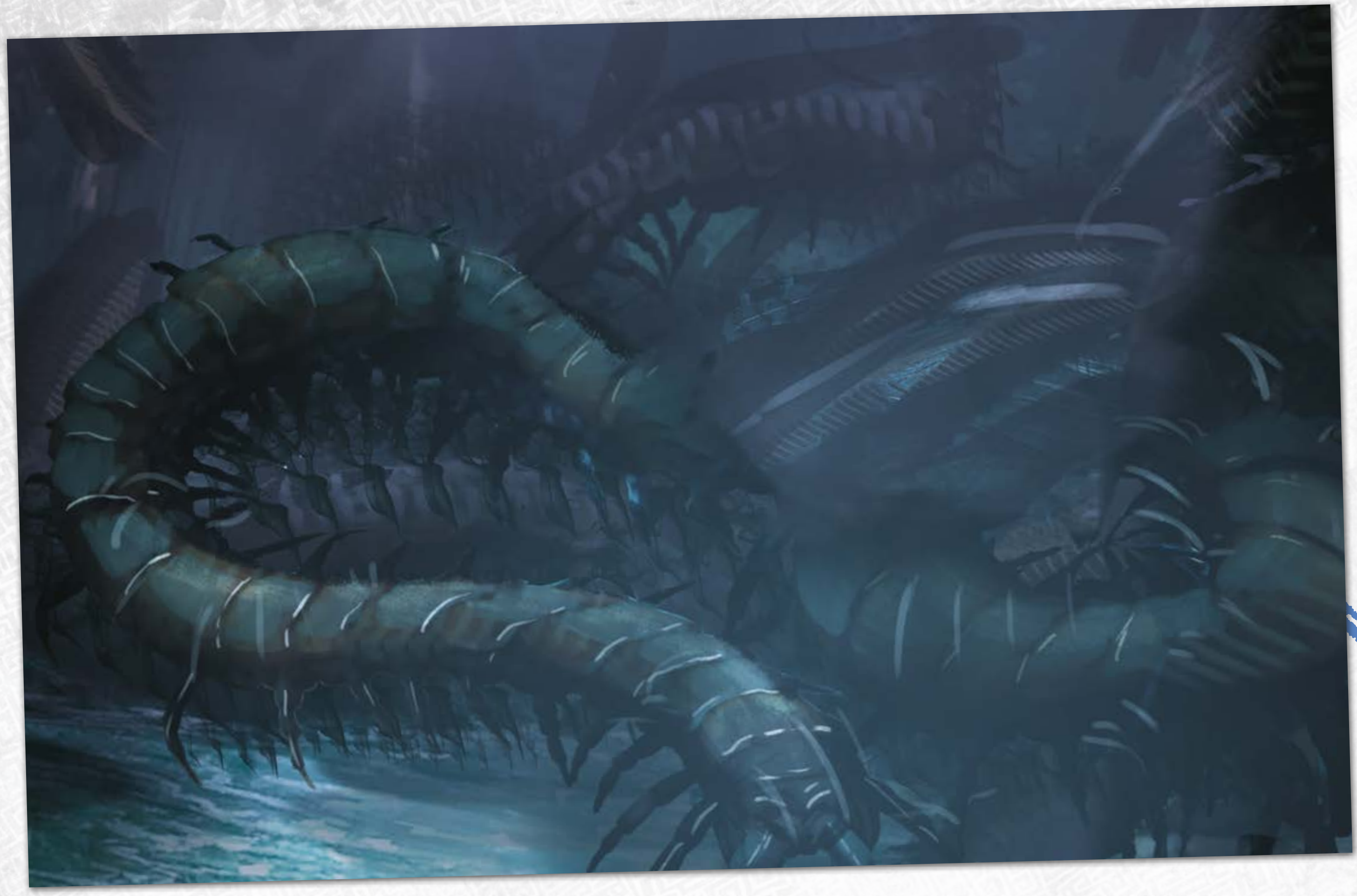
On the way to Los Rios, various random encounters can challenge players. Use as many or as few as you see fit. You can focus on physical hazards if your players aren't interested in combat scenes or vice versus if they like testing their characters' fighting chops. On the other hand, if pressed for time, skip the random encounters and dig into the scenes instead.

ACTIVE PREDATORS

Use the following story hooks to add action to your campaign or use them to inspire new ideas. You can find the statblocks for these encounters along with additional antagonists in *Chapter 5: NPCs (page 124)*.

DARK CITY DRONE

With a successful **Quickness** (**Study** or **Survival**) Test, Difficulty 3, the player characters identify a long-range drone coming into view, though not yet within range. It's too high to shoot down, but the characters may hide from it using a **Quickness** (**Sneak**) Test with a Difficulty of 2. Failure means the drone pinpoint the characters, preventing them from surprising the Dark City Thralls in Act Three.



MANYLEGS

While filling their canteens at a stream or river or while sleeping in a particularly wet or marshy area, a manylegs attacks. Similar to a centipede, the creature is a meter in length and highly poisonous. If the manylegs successfully hits a character, they take a *Poisoned* 2 Injury and a *paralyzed* Truth. They can treat the complication with a Difficulty 2 **Quickness** (**Survival**) Test or a Difficulty 2 **Insight** (**Study**) Test. If the manylegs suffers an Injury, it flees in search of easier prey.

PROWLCAT

The large, mutated cat has carapace armor and razor claws. A new mother, she slinks along the edge of her territory, ready to defend her hungry cubs. When the player characters enter her territory, they can spot her with a **Quickness** (**Study** or **Survival**) Test at Difficulty 3. Without a success, the prowlcat gains a *surprise attack* Truth. If the player characters spot her, they may engage her in combat directly or cautiously navigate around her with a Difficulty 2 **Quickness** (**Move**) Test.

EVERAN BANDITS

Along the trail, the player characters pass three corpses — two adults and a teenager. The bodies have nothing of value, executed and robbed within the past week. The local wildlife has already begun to scavenge the meat from their bones. Player characters may stop to bury the three or continue moving. But while digging graves or along the path, if they decide to keep moving, an Everan cries out for help. Ragged and hungry, she sobs and explains bandits are coming after her. She claims that she barely escaped.

But she's one of the bandits. Two of her compatriots circle behind as she creates a distraction. The characters can see through the ruse with an **Insight** (**Talk**) Test, Difficulty 2. Furthermore, they can spot the flanking bandits with a **Quickness** (**Study** or **Survival**) Test at Difficulty 2. If the player characters fail either Test or are unaware of the impending attack, the Everan Bandits gain the *ambush* Truth, in addition to their **Ambusher** special ability.

If the player characters defeat the Everan Bandits and choose to ransack their bodies, they gain:

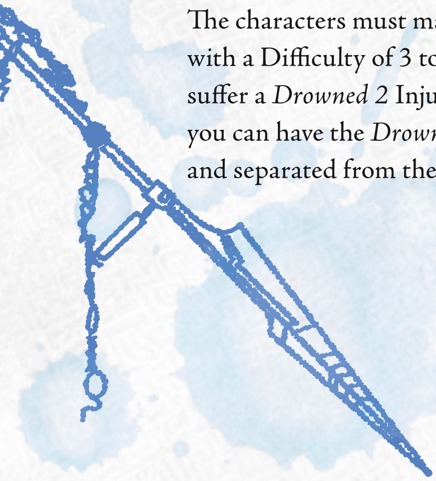
- Two Supply Points worth of salvage
- Two worn Swords (melee), *Lacerated* 2
- One Hunting Pulser (ranged), *Burned* 3, Long-range, Powered

PHYSICAL HAZARDS

While people and predators are certainly a hazard of the Waste, the environment can sometimes be even more brutal.

FLASH FLOOD

A torrential downpour ensues as the dark clouds roll in. The characters must make a **Quickness** (**Survival**) Test with a Difficulty of 3 to find high ground. Otherwise, they suffer a *Drowned* 2 Injury. In addition, or as an alternative, you can have the *Drowned* character swept up by the flood and separated from the rest of the group.



ROCKSLIDE

A rockslide blocks the way ahead for the player characters when navigating a particularly hilly area. They can either march around the slide, adding a half day to their journey, or safely climb the hill with a Difficulty 3 **Might** (**Survival**) Test. Failure results in a *Sprained Ankle 1* Injury.

THE HEAT

The summer heat is a natural oppressor and can be debilitating on long treks through the Wasteland. An **Insight** (**Survival**) Test with a Difficulty of 2 allows the player characters to find fresh water. Otherwise, they suffer a *dehydrated* Truth.

HELL'S GATE

The characters may encounter Hell's Gate, a notorious fixture of the Dorinda Wasteland. The huge metal door is 100 meters across, flat, sealed, and to date, impenetrable. The dense metallic surface can't be scratched, and no one knows what secrets it hides behind the vault door.

Hell's Gate is a geographical landmark between New Mossgrove and Los Rios and can help orient the characters. However, if your players are dissatisfied with unanswered questions or get derailed by fixating on the door, you may want to omit Hell's Gate from the adventure. Otherwise, use it to add ambiance to the overall experience.

RITES OF THE SPEAR

On the way to Los Rios, the player characters encounter a Spear Cell.

A trio of warriors riddled with scars, tattoos, and mutations stand on the roof of a dilapidated building. Dressed in leathers and plates of mismatched armor, each armed with an Electrospear, you recognize them as Spears. One has a malformed torso, and another has a mechanical leg. They bear the challenges of surviving for centuries in the irradiated wild with pride. They gaze out over the Wasteland, searching for something. When they see you, they adjust their Electrospears, but don't point them directly at you. While cautious, the Spears are not alarmed by your presence. After an awkward pause, a tall woman with bronze hair and skin jumps down to address you. "I am Spearmaster Samhadna Bosh. Declare your intentions but do so softly. We are in the middle of a hunt."

The Spears mirror the player characters' demeanor, meeting respect with respect and aggression with aggression. They state that the adventurers can continue their journey, though Samhadna asks them to keep a wide berth of the open plain. If the player characters wish to stay and trade with the Spears, they agree, although only after they complete the initiation ritual.

Use the Hostile Spear statblock from *Chapter 5: NPCs (page 151)* if the scene turns violent. The Spears aren't looking for a fight, but won't leave any of their people behind. If the scene remains peaceful and the player characters decide to stay and observe, continue to the next section.

A Spear points to a lower rooftop, some ways away, where a lone teenage warrior wields a long, unadorned steel spear. Lumbering up the corner of the building toward her is a Waker. The rusted hunk of junk creaks and whirs, half dead already from exposure to the elements.

"That is Ramzi," explains the Spearmaster. "She must kill the Waker. Only then will she achieve her First Hunt."

With a loud metallic, grating sound, the Waker hoists itself on the roof and swings at young Ramzi. She dodges the first attack but is struck backward by the second. Samhadna frowns but doesn't move. Ramzi recovers, avoiding a third blow before sliding underneath the metallic beast.

A HELPING HAND

While the young Spear's First Hunt can be cinematic, the players may also want to participate. If that's the case, have them roll an **Insight** (**Survive**), Difficulty 2 Test. If they succeed, the trio of Spears is so focused on a critical moment in the fight between Ramzi and the Waker, they miss seeing a pack of snarlbacks closing in on the girl's position. Use the snarlback statblock from *Chapter 5: NPCs (page 136)*.

The three small mutant wolves approach from the rear and prepare to strike with their elongated jaws. If the player characters jump in, the Spears let them handle the pack as they maintain their vigil on Ramzi. However, defending the teenager from the snarlbacks earns the player characters an invitation to observe her victory rite.

If the player characters don't intercede, the Spears. eventually see the pack and engage it. The Spears acknowledge the player characters, but leave them to go on their way before leaving to fight the snarlbacks.

With a series of jabs, Ramzi severs a rusted limb, causing the wounded Waker to collapse. She climbs atop the now defenseless mech and rams the tip of her spear into its power-supply. Sparks explode around her as the Spears shout in joy and victory.

TRADE AND TRADITION

The Spears quickly dismantle the Waker, claiming what pieces they can before escorting you to a hillside several kilometers away. Just as night falls, you reach a Spear Cell — a community protected from the elements. You weave through the camp, as the Spears head toward a rusted cargo container. Outside it, they prepare Ramzi for the ritual. The young Spear-to-be removes her armor and makeshift weapon and ritually cleanses herself. All she keeps in her hand is a long black and white wire claimed from the Waker she destroyed.

An aged Elder Smith meets her to escort her into the cargo container and closes the door behind them. Spearmaster Samhadna explains what is happening. "Do you see my spear? Do you see these bound cables and bits of metal? This spear was created hundreds of years ago to fight the Wakers. Each adornment represents a machine that this weapon has killed. You see this name etched upon it?" She points out an engraving that reads 'Bosh' "I was not born with this name. I was given this name when my Legacy chose me."

Samhadna gestures toward the cargo container. "Young Ramzi is about to be chosen. Inside is a collection of resting Electrospears. Each spear belongs to a fallen member of the Cell. Ramzi must meditate until a spear chooses her. She will then claim it and its namesake and add her kill to its Legacy."

The Spears talk and trade as the player characters wait for Ramzi to complete her ritual.

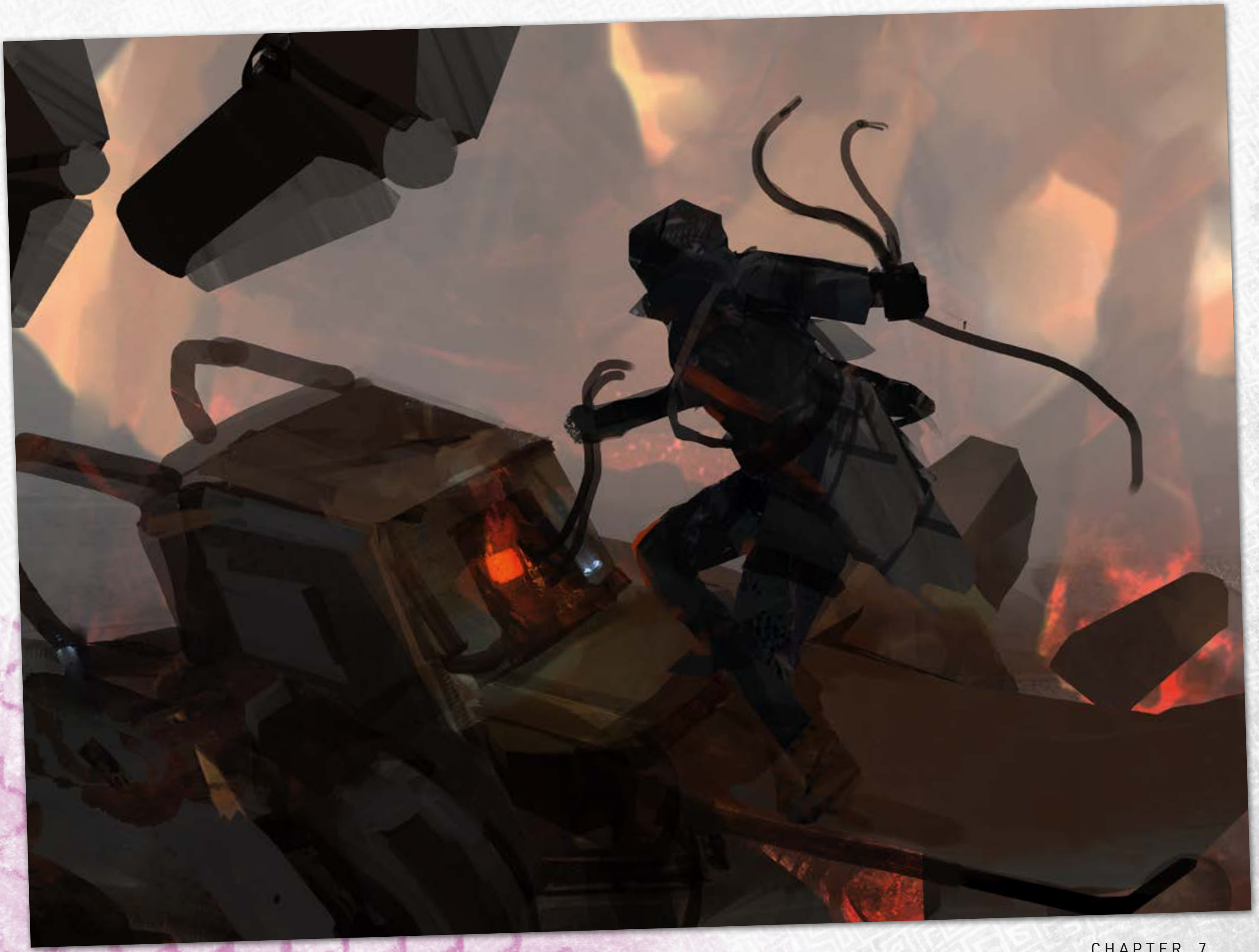
- If the player characters have navigation obstacles from Act 1, the Spears can help remedy them with a route to Los Rios.
- The Spears exchange 1 coin for 1 supply point or vice versa. They also accept spare weaponry (such as those taken from the Everan Bandits) in exchange for 1 coin each.
- If the player characters ask about Dr. Tiju's team. Samhadna nods, stating they saw an individual matching Tiju's description accompanied by three Grabbers five or six days ago. The Spearmaster continues, showing the player characters the direction Tiju headed either by tracing it on the map or pointing it out.

Several hours later, Ramzi exits the container.

The Elder Smith exits the armory, joined by Ramzi and her new Electrospear. It has a long point with a serrated edge and is bound in a half dozen wires of various colors, including the black and white one she claimed earlier. She comes to the fire with a broad smile and tears of joy in her eyes.

The Elder Smith raises his two mechanical hands. "The Legacy continues! Join me in welcoming your newest Spear! I present to you, Ramzi Gungnir!" The Spears burst into applause and celebration. The rest of the night, they feast on snarlback and drink firewine — a sweet, nonalcoholic beverage.

The following day, the Spears escort the player characters to a departure point and wish them a successful hunt.



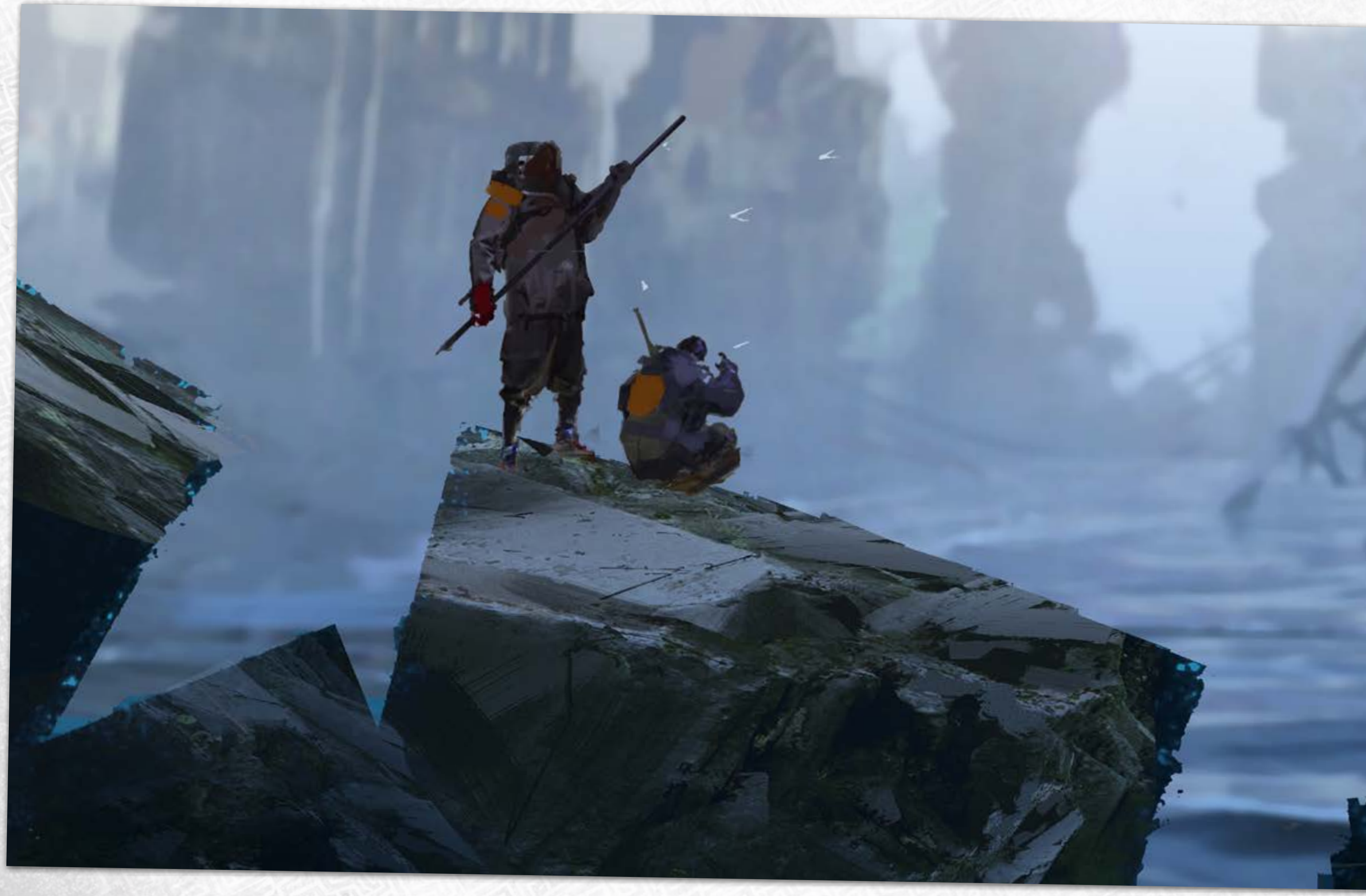
ARRIVAL AT LOS RIOS

> *On the horizon, you catch sight of Los Rios. The mega-resort once stood where two great rivers met, creating a lush, radiant shoreline. Today, however, it is an assemblage of shattered buildings, some barely standing while others lean against each other. There is less vegetation here, with the two rivers that once buttressed the resort town having shrunk and slowed to a trickle.*

Arriving at Los Rios is another opportunity to introduce some random encounters. To get there, the player characters must cross the expansive canyon where the two rivers used to meet. Three possible options include:

- **Walk around the ravine:** The player characters reach the canyon's end by traveling west along the south side, crossing to the northern side, and proceeding east toward Los Rios. Essentially, they're traveling the long way around, so they should prepare to camp for a couple of nights and deal with the predators who stalk the banks in search of easy prey.
- **Climb down the ravine:** Once the player characters rappel to the bottom, they can cross to the other side through a rushing stream and climb the other side. This requires two consecutive **Might** (**Move**) Tests, Difficulty 2. Each failure results in a *Bruised* 2 Injury, though a character may spend 2 Spirit to avoid each Injury. This path requires camping overnight at the bottom. While there could be predators, flash floods and mudslides pose a greater risk.

Los Rios
at last!



- **Cross a derelict bridge:** Having suffered numerous Waker attacks, the bridge across the ravine has seen better days. It's littered with holes and cracks. A large section hangs as if about to fall away at any moment. The bridge requires a successful **Insight** (**Study**) Test, Difficulty 2, to determine that someone must properly rig the hanging section using a suspension wire or rope. Then, a character must succeed on an **Insight** (**Operate**) Test, Difficulty 3, to repair the bridge. Finally, crossing the bridge requires a **Quickness** (**Move**) Test, Difficulty 2, to safely reach the other side. Failure results in the character falling into the canyon. They receive a *Broken Bones* 3 Injury, and are automatically defeated. Spirit may be used to avoid the Injury but the character is defeated regardless. The character is unconscious and cannot act until another character rescues them. But, with this risk comes the reward of potentially crossing to the other side in a single day.

WALKING DOWN THE STREET

Piles of rubble line the streets. Rusted hovercars rot in lots, consumed by weeds and vegetation. A tree bursts from an old building. Debris ten meters high fills the streets, blocking passage unless climbed over or otherwise circumvented. Signs of a recent battle are also evident.

Fresh scorch marks lead you to a shattered stone wall and the corpses of two Grabbers. One appears half-buried underneath the rubble, killed in the initial blast that knocked it down. The other body crawled several meters away before dying from blood loss.

Investigating the scene concludes the cause of death was a Waker and that the bodies are the remains of Izu Chavez and Buckie — the other voices heard on the recording. If the player characters scavenge the bodies, they find:

- Small bits of scavenged tech that add up to 2 Supply Points.
- A Hunting Pulser (ranged), *Burned* 3, Long-range, Powered.
- A plasma cutter (melee), *Burned* 3, Powered.
- Two coins.

If the player characters search for the Waker, they do not find it.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE WAKER?

Most Wakers revive for short periods, spend several hours roaming around to pursue their programming, and eventually return to their slumber. However, after this particular Waker attacked Dr. Tiju and the Grabbers, Dark City Founders absconded with it. The Dark City Founders have been operating in Los Rios for some time and are responsible for the initial power surge that woke the Waker. In the aftermath of the combat, the Founders led the Waker back to their city and are still investigating MERCY.

THE FALLEN SHOPPING COMPLEX

You enter the shopping complex where Dr. Tiju and the Grabbers rested before entering MERCY. Long ago, the luxury shopping complex glittered with glass storefronts and polished marble columns. Today, dust clouds every surface, and debris clutters the ground in random piles. Half the roof has caved in, and the subfloors below have rotted from water damage.

Fresh footprints in the dust lead you to the remnants of a designer clothing store and the last place Dr. Tiju and his team slept. An improvised camp remains, with apparent signs of activity, but none of their weapons or equipment are present. A window ledge has a clean section where they must have sat and looked out. From that vantage point, across the street and surrounded by jagged rubble, one can see the MERCY building.

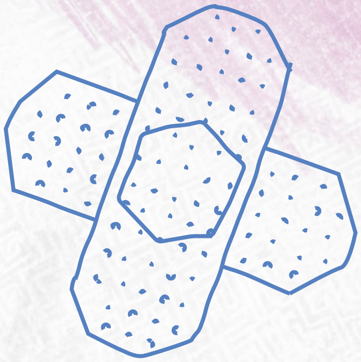
"Greetings!" exclaims a voice. Suddenly, a holographic figure manifests in front of you. A nano-geist wearing a well-tailored suit with perfectly coiffed hair smiles. "I am Simon, your Personal Shopping Assistant for River Valley Plaza. How may I be of service?"

SIMON THE NANO-GEIST

The nano-geist is a nanographic projection still functional after two centuries. Though it cannot harm the player characters, it can interact with them verbally and visually. Confined to the shopping complex and surrounding area, Simon may answer rudimentary questions. Some answers include:

- A visual schematic of the shopping complex and the surrounding buildings, including the main door into the MERCY building across the street
- Insights into Simon's interaction with Dr. Tiju and the Grabbers that Jen captured on her recording audio recording.
- Simon can verify that Dr. Tiju and the Grabbers left the shopping complex and, shortly afterward, encountered a Waker. The sound of violence followed, and the party did not return.

Despite his surroundings and the subject matter, Simon continues to be lighthearted and undaunted. If the player characters attack him, Simon either disappears and remains incorporeal until the player characters leave the area, or he defends himself with a Static Discharge melee or Kinetic Pulse ranged attack. For reference, use the nano-geist statblock from *Chapter 5: NPCs (page 141).*



ACT 3: A HEAP OF BROKEN THINGS

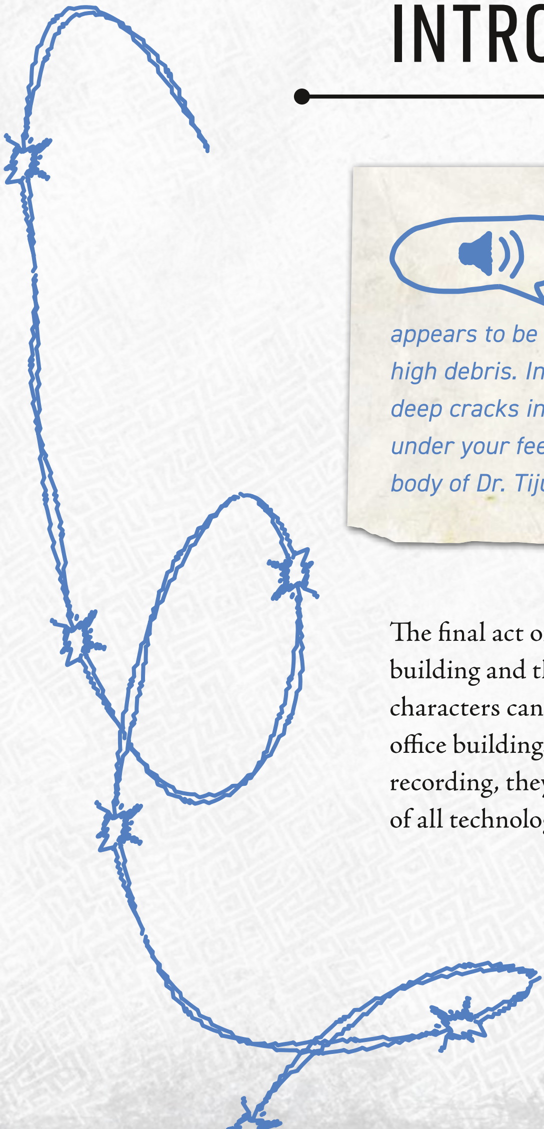
I really hope we can fix things up!

INTRODUCTION

Piles of wreckage and shattered stone surround the main entrance to the MERCY building. The only way into the building appears to be a fresh hole cut through the roughly three meter high debris. Inside, the office building is a hazardous wreck with deep cracks in the foundation and the crunch of shattered glass under your feet. Just inside the main entrance's threshold is the body of Dr. Tiju. Severe plasma burns blacken his chest.

RIP!

The final act of *Secrets in Los Rios* centers around the MERCY building and the Dark City Thralls ransacking it. Player characters can retrieve Dr. Tiju's body without entering the office building. But if they explore the lab from the audio recording, they'll face the Dark City team currently stripping it of all technology.



ACT 3 OBJECTIVES & EVENTS:

The climax of *Secrets in Los Rios* focuses on the discovery of Dr. Tiju and the exploration of MERCY.

- **In Search of Mercy (Objective):** Player characters arrive at MERCY.
- **The Purple Glow (Objective):** Dark City Thralls collect MERCY's experimental tech.

IN SEARCH OF MERCY

Finally, the player characters enter the MERCY division building. Like the rest of the area, the office is a hazardous wreck, with shattered glass, damaged walls, and piles of rubble. However, just inside the entrance is the bloody corpse of Dr. Tiju.

A successful **Insight** (**Fight** or **Study**) Test, Difficulty 2, determines the weapon used to kill Dr. Tiju was a heavy plasma repeater commonly found on military support Wakers. If the player characters search Dr Tiju's body, they find the following:

- A stylus
- A damaged eyepiece
- A journal containing
    - 3 folded notes shoved into the cover (**Knowledge Fragments E-G, page 213**)
    - Dr. Tiju's field notes (**Knowledge Fragments H-J, page 214**)
    - An old ECF Field Report (**Knowledge Fragment K, page 215**)

MERCY DIVISION

The player characters can collect the remains of Dr. Tiju and depart, or they can continue exploring the building.

FIRST FLOOR

This forward-facing lobby includes a welcome desk and security station for the 18-story building. A counter-high platform with a shattered holoprojector is in the middle of a crumbling east alcove. With a successful **Quickness** (**Operate**) Test, Difficulty 3, the player characters can get the holoprojector running again. When it kicks on, it releases a small swarm of malfunctioning nano-wisps along with the functional ones.

After the player characters swipe away the malfunctioning nano-wisps, the holoprojector produces a three-dimensional wireframe image of the building. Using gesture recognition technology, the characters can use their hands to make the building shrink, expand, and turn. A list populates with company names leasing space with their corresponding floor numbers. A simple **Insight** (**Study**) Test finds The MERCY Foundation.

Tapping on The MERCY Foundation logo, an article opens up with a serene looping video of a family playing along the sandy banks of a river. In the background, the Los Rios skyline reflects the oranges and purples of a setting sun, capturing what life must have been like in the 2300s.

A woman's voice says, "The MERCY Foundation is a Los Rios-based nonprofit organization connected to a network of charitable organizations, shelters, and community- based agencies. Many citizens within Los Rios have developed addictions to the psychotropic drugs used in many of our various establishments. The MERCY Foundation is dedicated to addressing the root causes of addiction and helping addicts recover.

"Our administrative offices are located on the 2nd floor, where you can learn about and donate to our ongoing mission. "

An additional successful **Insight** (**Study**) Test with a Difficulty of 1 reveals footprints in the dust and debris, indicating someone was here very recently.

SECOND FLOOR

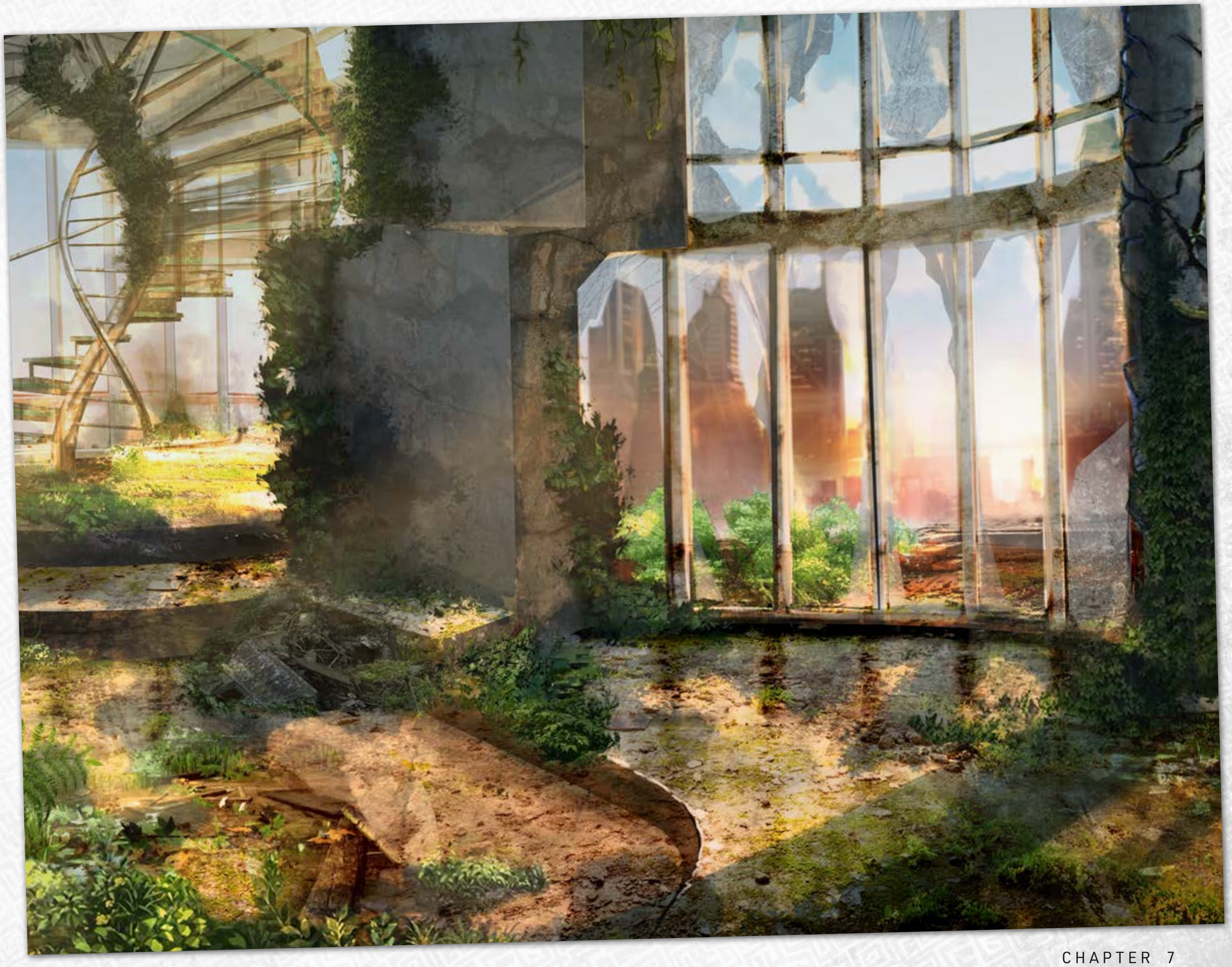
The second floor is a forward-facing "administrative" office. It includes a front desk, several individual offices, a communal area, and restrooms. It also consists of a lounge with a shattered panoramic glass window that once had an impressive river view. The offices on this floor were stripped of usable parts long ago. But even if every office had been packed with electricity-guzzling technology, it wouldn't have come close to the usage listed on the ECAD audit.

With a successful **Insight** (**Study**) Test with a Difficulty of 2, the player characters find a dust-covered keycard for a basement subfloor at the front desk and additional recent footprints.

THE BASEMENT SUBFLOOR

After passing through a small, empty warehouse area, the player characters reach a heavy, open security door. The door is as thick as a bank vault, protecting the main MERCY lab. Unlike the rest of the building, the labs are pristine, as if they had remained sealed until recently. Signs of a recent battle scar the walls. Electronic screens and input pads surrounding a sizeable flat projection platform are cracked or smashed.

Meanwhile, batteries and processing units are missing. A stained emergency shutdown procedure (**Knowledge Fragment L, page 216**) is on the floor, and on the wall is a framed plaque authorizing the ECF (**Knowledge Fragment M, page 217**). Beyond the labs is a loading area from which comes a faint purple glow.



WHAT IS MERCY DIVISION?

Los Rios was a mega-resort famous for luxury tourism and leisure. Between the constant flow of tourists visiting and departing, the glamor of designer shops, and the party atmosphere, a plain looking office building faded into the background. It was the perfect disguise for a government-funded scientific program.

MERCY Division was a more militant wing or rogue agent (depending on who you talk to) of the Everan Creation Foundation. The United Assembly empowered the ECF to oversee the Creation Initiative and ensure the ethical use of its technology. The pragmatic and security minded members of MERCY ran tests, experiments, and simulations on various technologies. This included speculative doomsday scenarios, analyzing what might happen if the Builder had access to nanotechnology, or what a combat mech might do if it was able to rewrite its own ethical subroutines.

The ECF deployed the Creation Initiative in 2356, ushering in a new era of prosperity. But less than thirty years later, the Builder turned against humanity, sparking the Builder's War. Some suggest the work of MERCY and its influence on the nanotech decision contributed significantly to humanity's ultimate survival.

THE PURPLE GLOW

Beyond the labs in the basement, a soft, purple glow emanates around the corner. The light grows brighter as you reach the loading area and discover a group of Dark City Thralls loading data storage towers, holoprojectors, and other tech stripped from the MERCY labs onto a 6-wheeled cargo sled. A mech with forklifts for hands assists them while a couple of scouts keep watch farther up the ramp toward the open air. With them are mechs resembling walking eyeballs with tapered legs and round bodies.

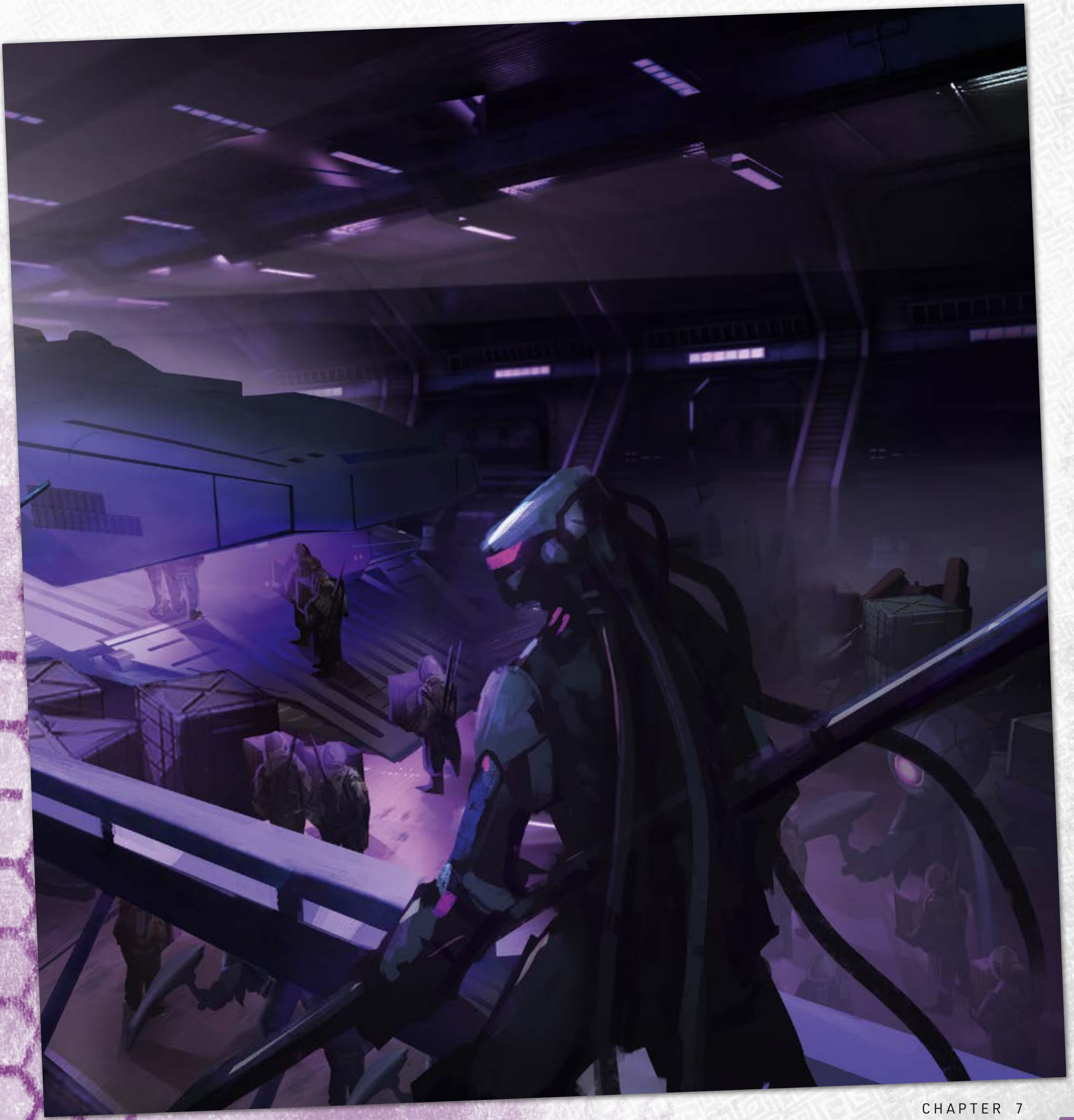
The Thralls equal the number of players unless you want to make the scene easier or harder. As an added challenge, you can include a single Dark City Founder commanding the crew. *Chapter 5: NPCs* has the statblocks for the Dark City Thrall (*page* 155)and Dark City Field Agent (*page* 157).

For the mechs, use the Agri-Pods statblock from the same chapter. The player characters should make a **Quickness** (**Sneak**) Test, Difficulty 2, to avoid being detected by the Dark City Thralls. If they're successful, you can allow them to act first in the action order or grant them 2 Momentum. Failure results in the Thralls spotting the characters and the beginning of combat.

The action area includes 4 zones:

- **Zone 1:** The stairwell to the first floor.
- **Zone 2:** The raised loading dock. Several stacked cargo boxes provide good cover. At least one Thrall is on the loading dock.
- **Zone 3:** The lower loading area. The remaining Thralls and the mech load tech onto the cargo sled. The data storage and server towers are large enough to provide some cover.
- **Zone 4:** The passageway exit. This underground tunnel leads to the street.

Remember that melee attacks are typically **Might** (**Fight**) or **Quickness** (**Fight**) Tests. If the opponent anticipates the attack, it is contested, with the defender rolling **Quickness** (**Fight**). Ranged attacks are exclusively **Quickness** (**Fight**) Tests. If the opponent anticipates the attack and stands in or near cover, the attack becomes contested, with the defender rolling **Quickness** (**Move**).



TO ABSENT FRIENDS

I will think of you often my friends!

CONCLUSION

Dr. Tiju's believed the MERCY servers contained a Pre-War copy of the Builder. He thought he could reinstall the program and return the world to how it was before the war. Unfortunately, there isn't an uncorrupted Builder stored anywhere at MERCY. The simulations were just that — simulations, and most of their work focused on the mechanized tech the Builder created. But, Dr. Tiju was on to something, he just didn't know what. Inside one of the data storage units is research and information that can be used to wake machines more quickly and vital information on how to hack into them to take control. This is extremely valuable to the Dark City. Whether or not they acquire it depends on the results of the battle.

AFTER THE COMBAT

The scene at the loading dock resolves in one of three ways. Determine which is the most appropriate for your conclusion.

TOTAL VICTORY

The player characters kill or capture the Thralls and their machines without any of them getting away. Reward your players with the following:

- The Data Storage unit that contains the technical information related to Waker wireless control. This might, theoretically, if coupled with some Old World tech, allow someone to remotely hack a Waker.
- Scrap from stripped machines equal to 4 Supply Points
- 3 hooked spears or barbed javelins
- 1 coin or 1 Supply Point per defeated Thrall
- A set of patterns for making a high-tier item using an Atoma. Choose one item from a single Atoma Type:
  - **Domestic Atoma Pattern:** Syth-Rope, Tool Kit (Tech Level 3), or Weaver Lens
  - **Industrial Atoma Pattern:** Medical Kit (Tech Level 3), Survival Kit (Tech Level 3), or Underwater Breathing Apparatus
  - **Security Atoma Pattern:** Bypass Kit, Privacy Cloak, or Surveillance Kit
  - **Military Atoma Pattern:** Thermal Blade, Heavy Armor (Tech Level 3), or Tactical Lens

PARTIAL VICTORY

- If some of the Thralls escape the battle, the player characters walk away with the following:
- The Data Storage unit that contains the technical information related to Waker wireless control. This might, theoretically, allow someone to remotely hack a Waker.
- Scrap from the stripped machine equal to 2 Supply Points
- 2 hooked spears or barbed javelins
- 1 coin or 1 Supply Point per defeated Thrall
- Schematic for making a mid-tier item using an Atoma. Choose one item from a single Atoma Type:
  - **Domestic Atoma Pattern:** First Aid Kit (Tech Level 3), Illuminator, or Synth-Rope
  - **Industrial Atoma Pattern:** Climbing Gear, Fire Suppression Kit, or Industrial Inductive Charger
  - **Security Atoma Pattern:** Stun Grenades, Thermal Staff, or Light Armor (Tech Level 3)

FAILURE OR DEFEAT

- If the Dark City Thralls defeat the player characters or force them to flee the scene, they earn the following:
- Scrap from a stripped machine equal to 1 Supply Point
- 1 hooked spear or barbed javelin
- Schematic for making a lower-tier item using an Atoma. Choose one item from a single Atoma Type:
  - **Domestic Atoma Pattern:** Binoculars (Tech Level 2), Data Storage Device, or First Aid Kit (Tech Level 3)
  - **Industrial Atoma Pattern:** Heavy Protective Gear (Tech Level 4), Climbing Gear, or Fire Suppression Kit

RETURN TO NEW MOSSGROVE

When the player character return to New Mossgrove, they may have captured Dark City Thralls with them. If so, they can deliver them to Wycliff Quarles, the head of the local militia.

The player characters also have a difficult decision to make. They can turn over the Data Storage information to Tysha (knowing how dangerous it is), they can keep it for themselves, they can turn it over to the Archivists, or they can destroy it.

Finally, they find Tysha Ota at the Wayhouse Inn. Tysha listens patiently to their report and accepts the remains of any of the original team, though she is especially saddened (and relieved) to be presented with the body of her friend, Dr. Samar Tiju.

> *Tysha pours a small glass of whiskey, handing one to each of the player characters. Then, she offers a toast. "We each struggle to survive. Sometimes that means relying on others. Our friends. Our neighbors." She lifts her glass to the player characters. "Sometimes hired strangers. And for them to trek out into the Waste and bring home a precious friend, risking their lives to do so, I cannot help but be in awe. You have my respect and gratitude. To absent friends."*

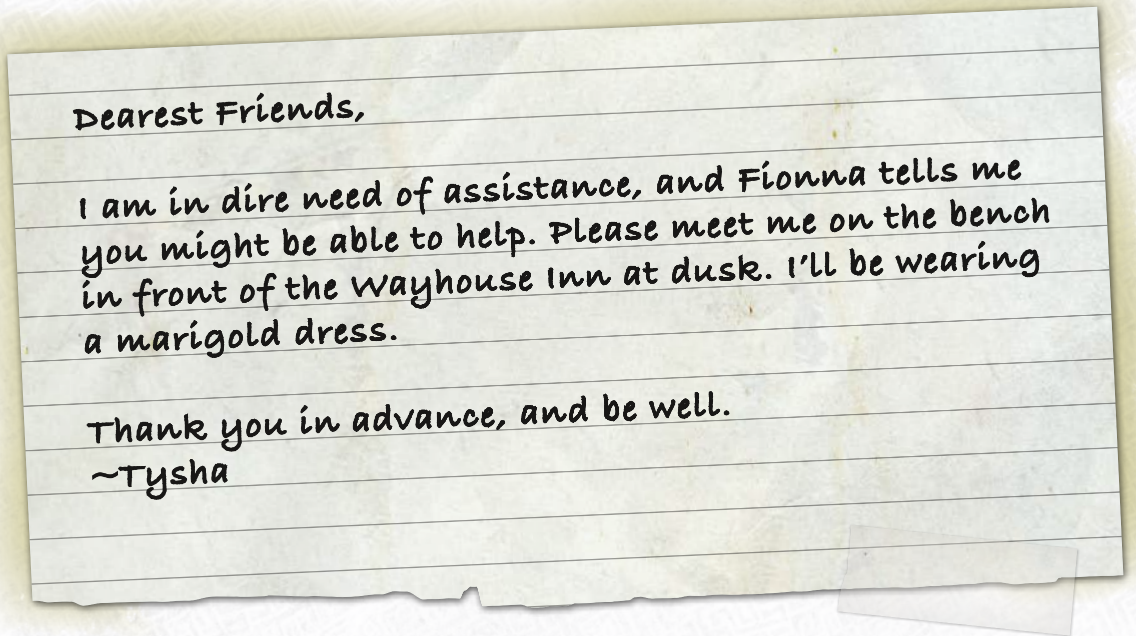
FURTHER ADVENTURES

Use the following plot hooks to develop additional adventures or as inspiration for your next sessions.

- If the player characters killed the prowlcat in Act Two, then they inadvertently left two cubs without a mother. On their way back to New Mossgrove, they encounter a pair of Everan hunters intent on killing the cubs. "Better a quick arrow than slow starvation in the Waste," they remark.
- If they lived, the three Everan Bandits from Act Two can become a future enemy. The bandits relocate to an encampment near Padrol Tower and start recruiting disenfranchised laborers to build a marauding gang.
- Left unchecked, the Dark City Founders claim Los Rios for themselves, using it as a forward base of operations. From the dead city they launch drones, send out hunting parties, and amass their army.
- While returning to New Mossgrove, some Thralls they've captured attempt to communicate. If the player characters can make out their language, they understand that the Thralls are telling them that a Dark City hunting party is coming to find them. In order to avoid the attack the player characters have to release the Thralls. If the player characters refuse, a Dark City hunting party can attack during the night, accompanied by a machine or two.
- Reviewing the data recovered from the MERCY servers, the player characters discover the location of other MERCY satellite offices. Looking at a map, those locations include the destroyed and heavily irradiated city of Kasteel, the Minicity of Sanktejo, and the Sekura Spaceport. Perhaps, by investigating all three satellites, the truth behind the MERCY project may be revealed, and more history of Evera Prime revealed.

ADVENTURE KNOWLEDGE FRAGMENTS

Knowledge Fragment A – a handwritten note

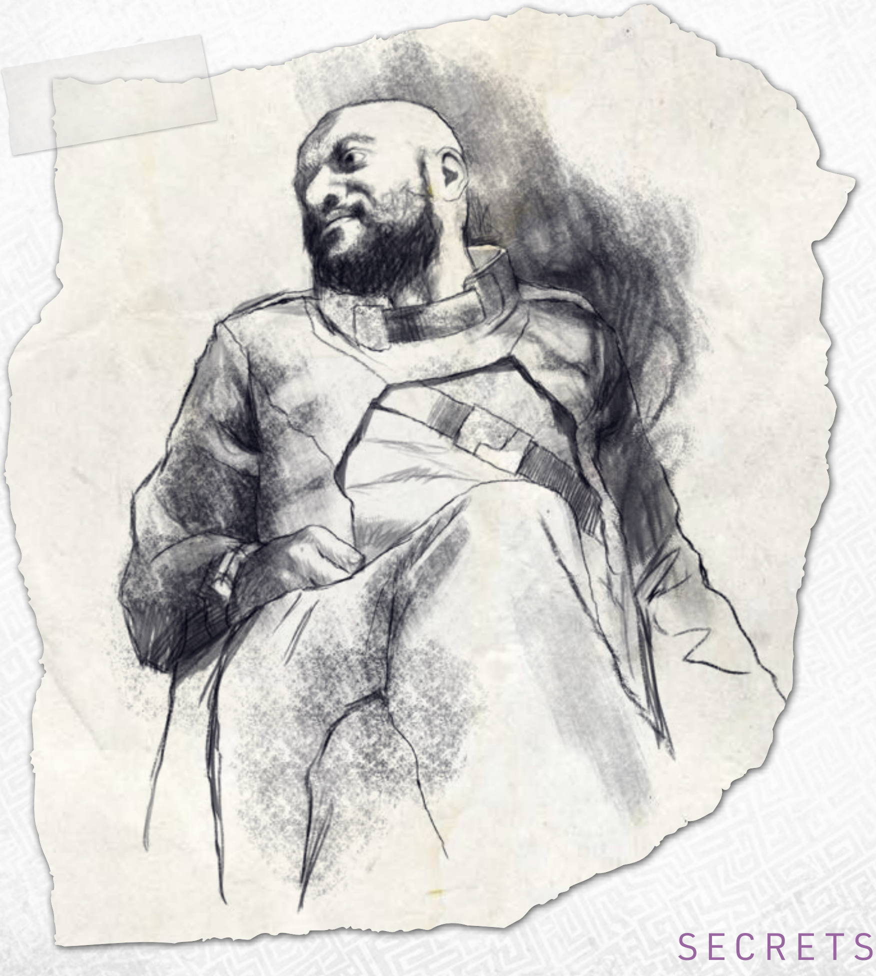


Dearest Friends,

I am in dire need of assistance, and Fionna tells me you might be able to help. Please meet me on the bench in front of the Wayhouse Inn at dusk. I'll be wearing a marigold dress.

Thank you in advance, and be well.
~Tysha

Knowledge Fragment B – Rudimentary charcoal sketch of Dr. Tiju

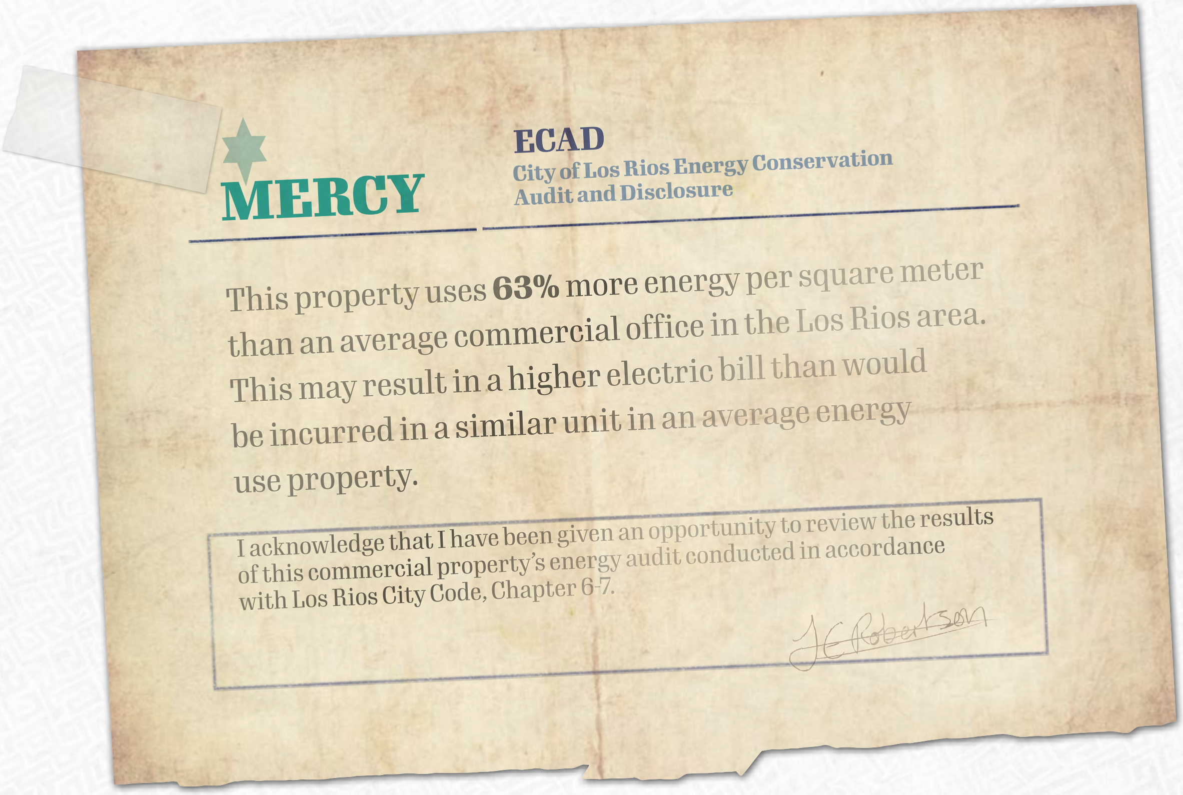


Knowledge Fragment C – Audio Recordings

https://youtu.be/8anHOc6MyYY?si=Sqjzt1BbNHbrLgQH

Transcript of this recording is available on the YouTube page.

Knowledge Fragment D – ECAD audit for MERCY in Los Rios



MERCY

ECAD

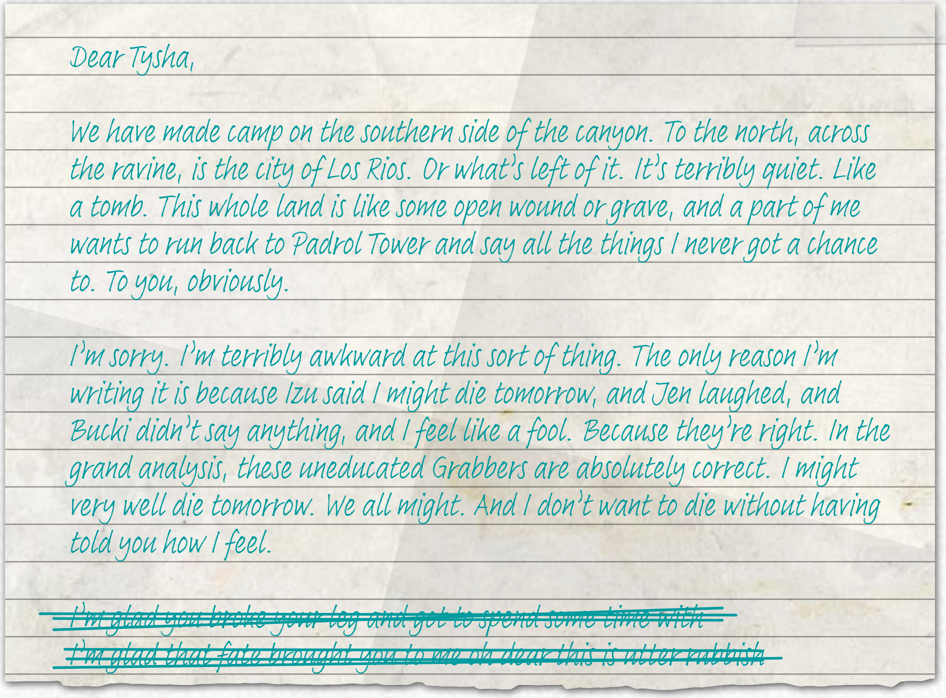
City of Los Rios Energy Conservation Audit and Disclosure

This property uses **63%** more energy per square meter than an average commercial office in the Los Rios area. This may result in a higher electric bill than would be incurred in a similar unit in an average energy use property.

I acknowledge that I have been given an opportunity to review the results of this commercial property's energy audit conducted in accordance with Los Rios City Code, Chapter 6-7.

JE Robertson

Knowledge Fragment E – Folded Note to Tysha #1



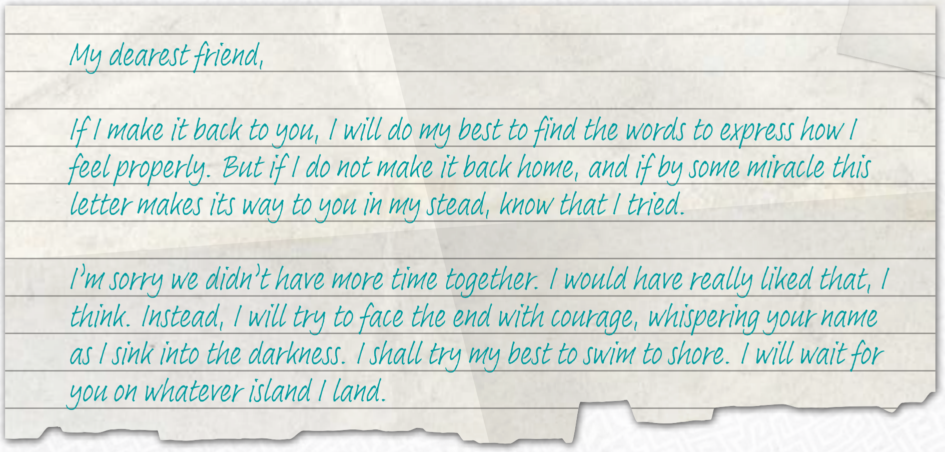
Dear Tysha,

We have made camp on the southern side of the canyon. To the north, across the ravine, is the city of Los Rios. Or what's left of it. It's terribly quiet. Like a tomb. This whole land is like some open wound or grave, and a part of me wants to run back to Padrol Tower and say all the things I never got a chance to. To you, obviously.

I'm sorry. I'm terribly awkward at this sort of thing. The only reason I'm writing it is because Izu said I might die tomorrow, and Jen laughed, and Bucki didn't say anything, and I feel like a fool. Because they're right. In the grand analysis, these uneducated Grabbers are absolutely correct. I might very well die tomorrow. We all might. And I don't want to die without having told you how I feel.

~~I'm glad you broke your leg and got to spend some time with~~
~~I'm glad that fate brought you to me oh dear this is utter rubbish~~

Knowledge Fragment F – Folded Note to Tysha #2

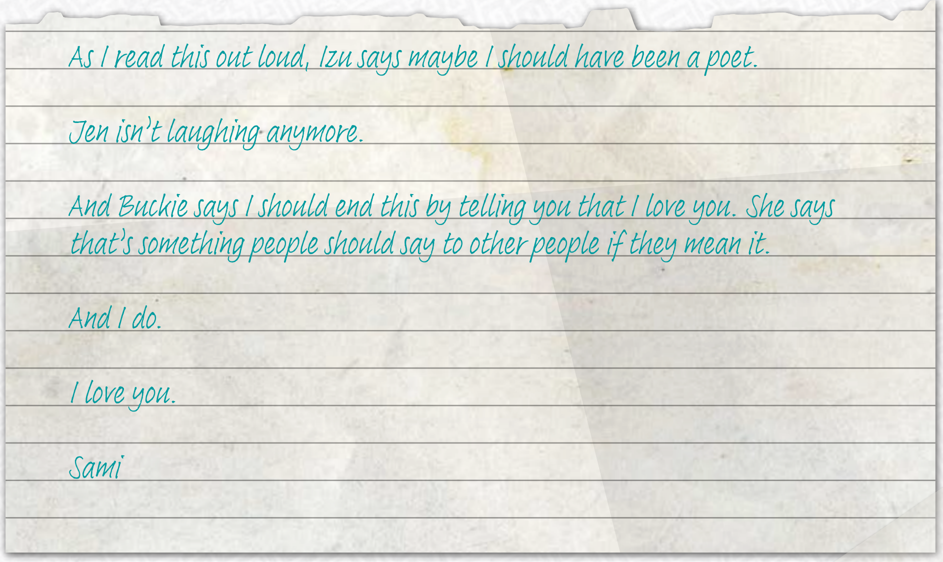


My dearest friend,

If I make it back to you, I will do my best to find the words to express how I feel properly. But if I do not make it back home, and if by some miracle this letter makes its way to you in my stead, know that I tried.

I'm sorry we didn't have more time together. I would have really liked that, I think. Instead, I will try to face the end with courage, whispering your name as I sink into the darkness. I shall try my best to swim to shore. I will wait for you on whatever island I land.

Knowledge Fragment G – Folded Note to Tysha #3



As I read this out loud, Izu says maybe I should have been a poet.

Jen isn't laughing anymore.

And Buckie says I should end this by telling you that I love you. She says that's something people should say to other people if they mean it.

And I do.

I love you.

Sami

Knowledge Fragment H – Field Notes of Dr. Tiju #1

We are slipping backward into the dark when every instinct demands that we march forward.

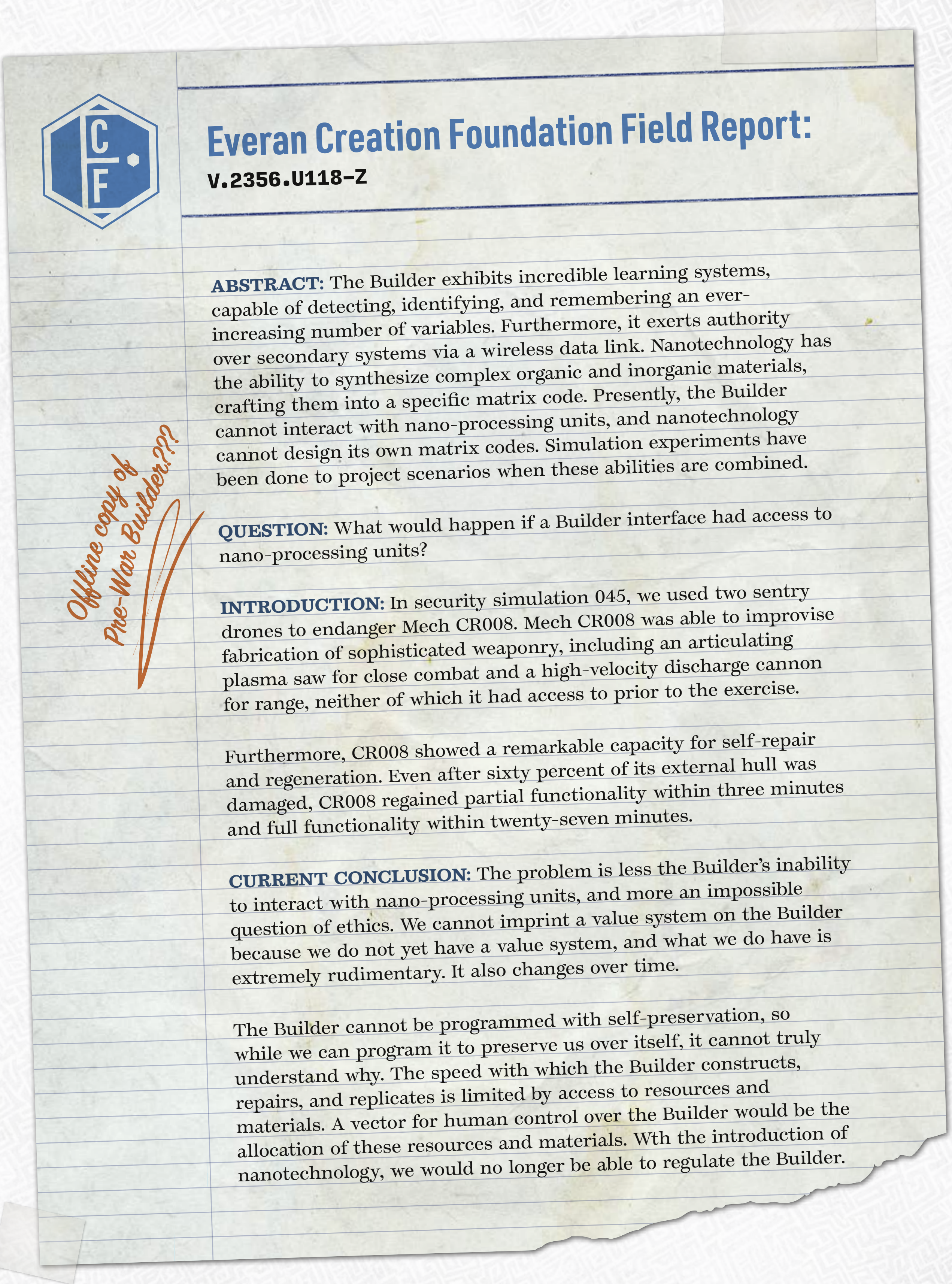
Knowledge Fragment I – Field Notes of Dr. Tiju #2

This MERCY Project. I fear it. Something is missing. Like an image beneath the painting when a true and accurate portrayal is denied me. Though of what, precisely, I cannot say. I have these scattered remains and stolen data points – an uneven tapestry. I must, therefore, separate the rational from the irrational and lay out what facts I have.

Knowledge Fragment J – Field Notes of Dr. Tiju #3

Given the enormous power drawn from the Utilihub, it's difficult to believe MERCY was benign. The processing units alone are suspect. Why use 8 NPUs when you only need two to run a standard processing core? Why the defensive programs? Why the redundant fail-safes? Why the security clearance? If there is nothing to hide and nothing that might harm them, why go to such lengths to protect themselves? Did they put the MERCY project in such an unlikely, non-military location to keep it secret? Were they conducting clandestine experiments on the local populace?

Knowledge Fragment K - ECF Field Report



Everan Creation Foundation Field Report:

V.2356.U118-Z

ABSTRACT: The Builder exhibits incredible learning systems, capable of detecting, identifying, and remembering an ever-increasing number of variables. Furthermore, it exerts authority over secondary systems via a wireless data link. Nanotechnology has the ability to synthesize complex organic and inorganic materials, crafting them into a specific matrix code. Presently, the Builder cannot interact with nano-processing units, and nanotechnology cannot design its own matrix codes. Simulation experiments have been done to project scenarios when these abilities are combined.

QUESTION: What would happen if a Builder interface had access to nano-processing units?

Offline copy of Pre-War Builder???

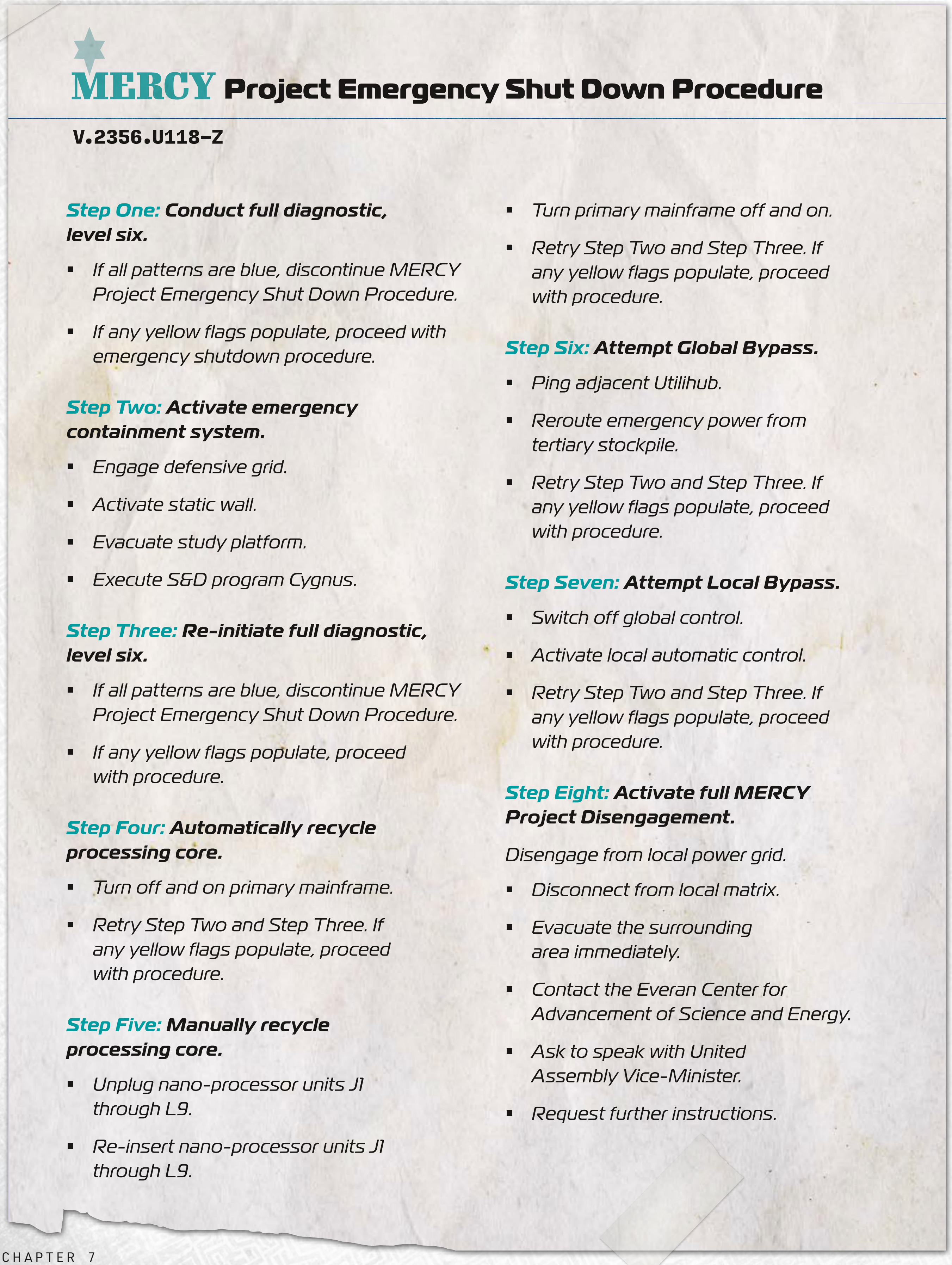
INTRODUCTION: In security simulation 045, we used two sentry drones to endanger Mech CR008. Mech CR008 was able to improvise fabrication of sophisticated weaponry, including an articulating plasma saw for close combat and a high-velocity discharge cannon for range, neither of which it had access to prior to the exercise.

Furthermore, CR008 showed a remarkable capacity for self-repair and regeneration. Even after sixty percent of its external hull was damaged, CR008 regained partial functionality within three minutes and full functionality within twenty-seven minutes.

CURRENT CONCLUSION: The problem is less the Builder's inability to interact with nano-processing units, and more an impossible question of ethics. We cannot imprint a value system on the Builder because we do not yet have a value system, and what we do have is extremely rudimentary. It also changes over time.

The Builder cannot be programmed with self-preservation, so while we can program it to preserve us over itself, it cannot truly understand why. The speed with which the Builder constructs, repairs, and replicates is limited by access to resources and materials. A vector for human control over the Builder would be the allocation of these resources and materials. Wth the introduction of nanotechnology, we would no longer be able to regulate the Builder.

Knowledge Fragment L



MERCY Project Emergency Shut Down Procedure

V.2356.U118-Z

Step One: Conduct full diagnostic, level six.

- *If all patterns are blue, discontinue MERCY Project Emergency Shut Down Procedure.*
- *If any yellow flags populate, proceed with emergency shutdown procedure.*

Step Two: Activate emergency containment system.

- *Engage defensive grid.*
- *Activate static wall.*
- *Evacuate study platform.*
- *Execute S&D program Cygnus.*

Step Three: Re-initiate full diagnostic, level six.

- *If all patterns are blue, discontinue MERCY Project Emergency Shut Down Procedure.*
- *If any yellow flags populate, proceed with procedure.*

Step Four: Automatically recycle processing core.

- *Turn off and on primary mainframe.*
- *Retry Step Two and Step Three. If any yellow flags populate, proceed with procedure.*

Step Five: Manually recycle processing core.

- *Unplug nano-processor units J1 through L9.*
- *Re-insert nano-processor units J1 through L9.*
- *Turn primary mainframe off and on.*
- *Retry Step Two and Step Three. If any yellow flags populate, proceed with procedure.*

Step Six: Attempt Global Bypass.

- *Ping adjacent Utilihub.*
- *Reroute emergency power from tertiary stockpile.*
- *Retry Step Two and Step Three. If any yellow flags populate, proceed with procedure.*

Step Seven: Attempt Local Bypass.

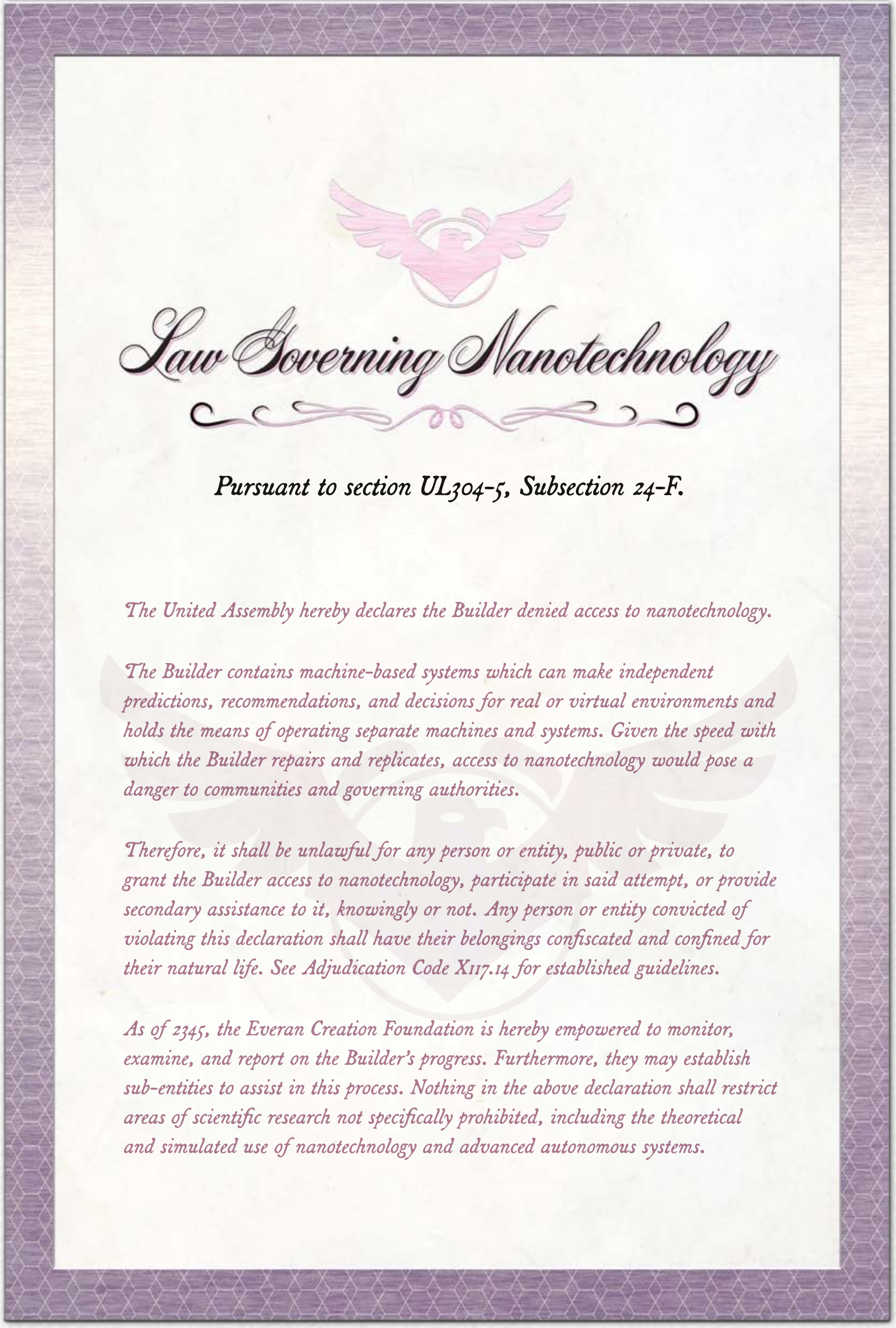
- *Switch off global control.*
- *Activate local automatic control.*
- *Retry Step Two and Step Three. If any yellow flags populate, proceed with procedure.*

Step Eight: Activate full MERCY Project Disengagement.

Disengage from local power grid.

- *Disconnect from local matrix.*
- *Evacuate the surrounding area immediately.*
- *Contact the Everan Center for Advancement of Science and Energy.*
- *Ask to speak with United Assembly Vice-Minister.*
- *Request further instructions.*

Knowledge Fragment M – Wall Plaque



Law Governing Nanotechnology

Pursuant to section UL304-5, Subsection 24-F.

The United Assembly hereby declares the Builder denied access to nanotechnology.

The Builder contains machine-based systems which can make independent predictions, recommendations, and decisions for real or virtual environments and holds the means of operating separate machines and systems. Given the speed with which the Builder repairs and replicates, access to nanotechnology would pose a danger to communities and governing authorities.

Therefore, it shall be unlawful for any person or entity, public or private, to grant the Builder access to nanotechnology, participate in said attempt, or provide secondary assistance to it, knowingly or not. Any person or entity convicted of violating this declaration shall have their belongings confiscated and confined for their natural life. See Adjudication Code X117.14 for established guidelines.

As of 2345, the Everan Creation Foundation is hereby empowered to monitor, examine, and report on the Builder's progress. Furthermore, they may establish sub-entities to assist in this process. Nothing in the above declaration shall restrict areas of scientific research not specifically prohibited, including the theoretical and simulated use of nanotechnology and advanced autonomous systems.

QUICK REFERENCE

TESTS

A Test involves rolling 2 or more 2d20s. Players can add additional dice to the test by spending Spirit. Each die that rolls equal to or lower than the Attribute being rolled against is a success; each die that rolls equal to or lower than the Skill used for that Test scores *two* successes instead. If the number of successes rolled is equal to or higher than the Difficulty of the Test, the Test is passed. Each additional success adds 1 Momentum to the group pool. Each roll of a natural 20 causes a complication.

TEST DIFFICULTIES

0 - Simple

1 - Routine

2 - Average

3 - Challenging

4 - Difficult

5 - Daunting

COMPLICATION RANGES

The complication range can never be increased to more than five.

COMPLICATION RANGE	COMPLICATIONS OCCUR ON...
1	20
2	19, 20
3	18, 19, 20
4	17, 18, 19, 20
5	16, 17, 18, 19, 20

TYPES OF EXHAUSTION

Characters become exhausted when their Spirit reaches 0. Choose which type of exhaustion your character is suffering. They automatically fail Tests related to the chosen attribute, and all other Tests suffer a +1 penalty. An exhausted character cannot regain Spirit by spending Momentum or adding to Threat.

Weary characters shut down their **Might** attribute.

Breathless characters shut down their **Quickness** attribute.

Confused characters shut down their **Insight** attribute.

Despairing characters shut down their **Resolve** attribute.

RESTING

Characters can regain Spirit by eating, or by resting. There are three types of Rest.

- **Breather:** A Breather takes a couple of minutes. Each character regains 2 Spirit by taking a Breather.
- **Break:** A Break takes at least half an hour. Each character regains 4 Spirit by taking a Break.
- **Bed:** Bed is a full rest, taking several hours, and usually requiring the character to sleep. Each character regains 6 Spirit by going to Bed.

TYPES OF TRUTHS

- A **location** Truth is some fact or detail about the location itself, for example, dense forest or abandoned road.
- A **situation** Truth describes something that is happening in the scene, for example, bustling crowds or heavy fog.
- A **personal** Truth describes the nature or state of a character or creature, for example good mood, or the species of the character.
- An **equipment** Truth describe a single item, object, or tool, such as a spear or a flashlight.

COMMON USES FOR MOMENTUM

The following uses for Momentum are always available:

- **Second Wind:** You can use Momentum to restore up to three lost Spirit (to yourself or to a single ally who can see and hear you) after a successful Test. Restoring one point of Spirit costs 1 Momentum, restoring 2 costs 3 Momentum, and restoring 3 costs 6 Momentum.
- **Create Truth:** You can use Momentum to add, remove, or change facts about a scene. Spending 2 Momentum establishes a new Truth, or changes or removes a Truth that already exists. This change must relate to the Test you've just succeeded at, and it should be something that could reasonably have been achieved by the character.
- **Ask a Question:** You can spend Momentum to ask the gamemaster a question about the scene, or something in the scene. The gamemaster will answer according to what your character would be able to perceive or deduce in that situation; the GM may give an answer of "you don't know", but if they do, the Momentum spent is returned immediately. Otherwise, the answer must be truthful, but might not be complete, and it may be somewhat cryptic. Each question costs 1 Momentum, and you can choose to ask one question, get the answer, and then decide if you want to buy additional questions.
- **Damage:** When you succeed at an attack you may increase the damage rating of the Injury you inflict by +1 for each Momentum you spend.
- **Reduce Time:** If the action you've taken would take a long time to complete, you may spend Momentum to reduce how long it takes. As a rule of thumb, 2 Momentum will halve the amount of time an action would take to complete.
- **Follow-Up:** after succeeding at a Test, you may spend 2 Momentum to immediately attempt another action before any other character can attempt to act or respond. If a Test is required as part of this action, then the Difficulty is increased by +1. You cannot use follow-up twice in a row: the extra action cannot be used to get you another extra action.

SPENDING THREAT

The gamemaster may add to Threat in the following ways:

- **Threatening Circumstances:** The environment or circumstances of a new scene may be threatening or perilous enough to warrant adding one or two Threat to the pool automatically. Similarly, some NPCs may generate Threat simply by arriving, in response to changes in the situation, or by taking certain actions. This also includes activities that escalate the tensions of the scene, such as a dormant machine awakening, threatening to awaken others nearby.
- **Non-Player Character Momentum:** NPCs with unspent Momentum cannot save it as PCs can: NPCs don't have a group Momentum pool. Instead, an NPC may spend Momentum to add to Threat, adding one Threat for every Momentum they spend.

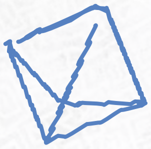
In return, the Gamemaster can spend Threat in several common ways:

- **Non-Player Character Spirit and Momentum:** The Threat pool serves as a mirror for the players' group Momentum pool, and the individual player characters' Spirit. Thus, NPCs may use Threat in all the ways that player characters use group Momentum or their own Spirit.
- **Non-Player Character Threat Spends:** On any action or choice where a player character would normally add one or more points to Threat, an NPC performing that same action or making that same choice must spend an equivalent number of points of Threat.
- **Non-Player Character Complications:** If an NPC suffers a complication, the gamemaster may buy off that complication by spending two Threat.
- **Complication:** The gamemaster may create a negative Truth by spending two Threat. This must come naturally from some part of the current situation.
- **Reinforcements:** The gamemaster may bring in additional NPCs during a scene. Normal NPCs cost one Threat each. Note that this does not apply to NPCs present at the start of the scene, only additional NPCs who arrive while the scene is playing out, and there must be some logical reason why those reinforcements have arrived and where they've come from.
- **Environmental Effects and Narrative Changes:** The gamemaster may trigger or cause problems with the scene or environment by spending Threat.

SPENDING SPIRIT

There are a few ways in which Spirit can be spent:

- **Add a die:** when you attempt a Skill Test, you may spend Spirit to buy up to three additional d20s before you roll. Each d20 costs 1 Spirit.
- **Re-roll a die:** when you attempt a Skill Test, after you've rolled, you may spend 1 Spirit to re-roll a single d20.
- **Avoid Injury:** when you suffer an Injury or some negative consequence, you may spend Spirit to avoid that Injury, with more serious injuries costing more Spirit to avoid.



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SOMETHING IS WAKING ON EVERA PRIME

Dreams and Machines is a brand new tabletop roleplaying game where people come together to rebuild their world following a catastrophic war. The Dreams and Machines Gamemaster's Guide gives you the rules and tools to immerse yourself and your players into the history and setting of Evera Prime. Challenge your players with mutants and mechs alike, while traveling the beautiful but dangerous landscape of this colony world.

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- *A host of challenging enemies including malevolent nanograms, Civilian, Industrial, and Military Wakers, vicious bioengineered creatures, and dangerous plantlife! Plus a host of sample NPCs from across various factions to populate your adventures.*
- *Rules to build your own Wakers and challenge the players!*
- *A complete starting adventure; Secrets in Los Rios, which can be played standalone or following on from the events of the campaign in the* ***Dreams and Machines Starter Set****.*

Requires the Dreams and Machines Player's Guide.

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